Home Office

Earned Settlement findings report: targeted survey

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Executive summary

The Immigration White Paper (May 2025) set out proposals to reform the UK's settlement system, moving from a primarily time-served model to an Earned Settlement framework. This research examined how current and former visa and protection route holders understand settlement, their intentions under the current framework, and how proposed changes may influence future behaviour, migration decisions and longer-term integration outcomes.

Findings are based on an online survey of 4,728 current and former UK visa and protection route holders, including those on established routes to settlement and those on Student and Graduate routes. Together, the findings provide robust evidence on awareness, intentions and potential behavioural responses to the proposed reforms.

Introduction and methodology

This research was commissioned to inform understanding of how proposed changes to settlement may affect current visa and protection route holders. It captures views across a wide range of visa routes, including Skilled Worker (including Health and Care), Global Talent, British National (Overseas), Family, Asylum and Safe and Legal (Humanitarian) routes, as well as the Student and Graduate routes, which do not directly lead to settlement (but lead to other visa routes which do).

The study focused on 3 main analytical groups throughout:

- Those on routes to settlement,
- Those on Student and Graduate routes (covered in detail in Chapter 5), and
- Those who had already obtained Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR), whose experiences and reflections on the settlement process are explored in Chapter 6.

The survey was conducted for over five weeks in February and March 2026, during a period of significant public discussion regarding proposed changes to settlement policy. Awareness of the proposed reforms was high among respondents, and those who believed the proposals could affect their future immigration status may have been more likely to respond to the survey.

Settlement intentions

Awareness, consideration and intentions to apply

Awareness of settlement among those on routes to settlement was near universal (98%) and typically developed early. Most of those aware (94%) had considered applying for settlement, often prior to arrival (64%), indicating that it is a core part of early migration planning. Settlement also played a meaningful, though not universal, role in decisions to migrate: 77% of those who considered settlement prior to arrival said it influenced their decision to come to the UK (compared to 35% overall).

Intentions to apply were common among those on routes to settlement. Among those who had considered settlement, 92% had applied or intended to apply. However, stated intentions exceed historic settlement rates, suggesting that early intentions may not always translate into outcomes.

Alternative options and contingency planning

Contingency planning was widespread. Among those uncertain or not intending to apply for settlement, 81% were considering alternatives, including leaving the UK (53%) or staying via other routes (45%). Individuals with protection status were less likely to consider leaving the UK (21%).

Among those intending to apply, 56% were also considering alternative ways to remain in the UK and 22% were also considering leaving. The main reasons for uncertainty included timescales, application requirements, and personal or economic factors. Overall, rather than a lack of appetite to stay in the UK, system-related uncertainty was the key driver for individuals in making alternative plans alongside applying for settlement.

Awareness of proposed changes to the current settlement framework, and impacts of the proposed changes

Intention to apply for settlement under existing rules was high. Among those on a route to settlement who had not already applied for settlement, 87%[1] said they would probably (21%) or definitely (65%) apply. Visa Holders were more likely than those with protection status to intend to apply for settlement, and likelihood also increased with income, qualifications and English proficiency. Overall, this points to strong underlying demand for settlement, particularly among higher earners, and those with higher qualification and English proficiency levels.

Awareness of proposed reforms was high (79% overall) but varied by route and circumstances. Visa Holders were more likely to be aware than those with protection status (80% vs 71%), and awareness was highest for work-related routes. Awareness was also closely linked to engagement with settlement and shorter times remaining before eligibility.

Proposed reforms were associated with reduced certainty and potential changes in behaviour. Under an Earned Settlement model, 48% said they would apply, while 36% were unsure and 16% would not apply. Around half (49%) said they would or might change their intentions, particularly among higher-earning, higher-skilled and work-route groups. The main driver was the increased time required to qualify.

Extending the qualifying period appeared to act as a deterrent to migration and long-term stay. Only 37% said they would have come to the UK if the qualifying period had been 10 years, compared with 38% who would not (24% were unsure). Willingness to remain in the UK without settlement was limited.

Responses to specific incentives were mixed and often constrained by practical barriers. 55% said it was not feasible to move into a higher-paid job within a year. While around a third indicated willingness to switch roles or sectors if it reduced the qualifying period, others cited barriers such as qualifications, experience or satisfaction with current employment. In contrast, incentives

[1] Due to rounding, totals may not always sum exactly to 100% or to the stated total.

aligned with existing characteristics, such as those for current higher and additional taxpayers, may face fewer practical barriers as they do not depend on individuals changing jobs or sectors.

Support for transitional arrangements was strong, with 82% agreeing that those already on a 5-year pathway should be protected.

Future plans

Among those intending to settle, most anticipated stability in employment after receiving settled status. Close to three-fifths (58%) expected to remain in their current role, while smaller proportions anticipated changing jobs (11%), starting a business (11%) or undertaking further or higher education (10%).

Intentions to apply for British citizenship were high among those on routes to settlement, with 87% saying they would probably or definitely apply (97% for BN(O) Visa Holders).

Student and graduates

Awareness of settlement was relatively high, with 57% aware prior to arrival in the UK. Albeit this was lower than for those on settlement routes (75%), reflecting later engagement overall. Among those aware of settlement, 91% had considered applying, typically at a later stage. Settlement also played a more limited role in initial migration decisions.

Among those who had considered applying for settlement, 78% intended to do so, while 20% were unsure. Under the current framework, 80% said they would probably or definitely apply for settlement, including 46% who would definitely do so. However, contingency planning was widespread: 76% of those unsure or not intending to apply were considering leaving the UK, and 75% of those intending to apply were also exploring alternative routes, such as visa extensions or switching pathways.

Proposed changes to the settlement system appeared likely to reduce certainty further. Only 31% said they would apply under an Earned Settlement model, while 47% were unsure and 22% would not apply.

Policy-specific incentives showed mixed effects. While 41% indicated they would consider switching to a higher-paying job if it reduced the qualifying period, 61% said it would not be feasible to do so within the next year, and 48% said it would remain infeasible over 12-24 months. Similarly, half said they would not apply for public service roles even if this reduced the qualifying period.

There was strong support for transitional arrangements, with 83% agreeing that those already on a 5-year route should be protected. For those intending to settle, 49% expected to remain in their current role after settlement, while 22% anticipated looking for a new job and 17% expected to start a business. Intentions to progress to British citizenship were less certain, with 46% saying they would definitely apply.

Overall, Student and Graduate route holders engaged with settlement later and with greater uncertainty. They were particularly sensitive to policies that extended the time required to qualify.

Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR)

Among those with Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR), first consideration of settlement was roughly split evenly between pre-arrival and post-arrival stages. Earlier consideration was more common among higher earners, suggesting a link between economic position and forward planning.

The influence of settlement on migration decisions was mixed. Around 43% said it influenced their decision to come to the UK, while 30% said it had little or no impact. Similarly, 39% reported that settlement prospects influenced their visa choice.

When reflecting on a hypothetical Earned Settlement system, responses were divided. Around 51% said it would not have altered their decision to apply for a visa, 16% said they would not have applied and 33% were unsure. Similar uncertainty was evident for settlement decisions.

Chapter 1: Introduction and methodology

The Immigration White Paper, published in May 2025, set out proposed changes to the current settlement model. The current system is based on time in the UK and the 'Life in the UK' test. The proposed revised system is based around the four pillars of:

- Character
- Integration (e.g. English proficiency; community engagement)
- Contribution (e.g. NI and tax contributions)
- Residence (e.g. time on specific visa routes, job, partner/parent of a British citizen)

This research sought to investigate:

- How the proposed policy changes impact current UK Visa Holders on a path to settlement

Survey methodology

The survey was designed and administered by IFF Research on behalf of the Home Office. It gathered the views and experiences of current and former UK Visa Holders and protection route holders in relation to settlement and the proposed transition to an Earned Settlement approach.

To maximise accessibility and representativeness, the survey was also translated into 5 languages: Farsi, Dari, Pashto, Tigrinya and Modern Standard Arabic. The survey was cognitively tested with 10 Visa Holders prior to launch in February 2026. The survey of Visa Holders was open for 5 and a half weeks and received a total of 4,728 responses.

Designed with tailored routing and scenario-based questions, the survey captured detailed information on respondents':

- Visa histories;
- Employment and financial circumstances;
- Qualifications;
- English language proficiency;
- Demographic characteristics;
- Awareness of settlement policy and proposed changes;
- Intentions to apply for settlement; and

- Behavioural intentions in relation to the Earned Settlement proposals, including: qualifying periods, incentives for economic contribution and how potential penalties may influence future decisions.

The survey targeted individuals currently on a pathway to settlement (or visas which could lead to a pathway to settlement) as well as those who had already obtained settlement. Participation in the survey was entirely voluntary and anonymous upon completion. The sampling approach was structured to achieve robust coverage across major visa and protection routes, to enable comprehensive subgroup analysis. The survey of Visa Holders was conducted with individuals on the following visa or Humanitarian routes:

- Global Talent;
- British National (Overseas) (BN(O));
- Skilled Worker and Skilled Worker (Health and Care);
- Asylum or Humanitarian: Refugee, Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme and Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy;
- Student and Graduate;
- Family: Partner and Private Life; and
- Other routes: T2 minister of religion, UK Ancestry, Innovator Founder, International Sportsperson and Discretionary leave.

Those who have received Indefinite Leave to Remain or Settled Status since obtaining their visa were also able to complete the survey.

Sampling was shaped by the need to achieve robust base sizes for each route, with disproportionate sampling and census-style draws applied to routes with very small populations. Demographic variables, including age, gender, and nationality, were included in the sample to support subgroup analysis and monitoring of response patterns. For each eligible route, the sampling frame comprised all cases granted within the full qualifying period for settlement on that route (for example, 3 or 5 years). The frame was extended to include grants issued immediately prior to this window to ensure inclusion of individuals who may already have reached, or passed, their eligibility point. This approach enabled coverage of both those currently progressing toward settlement and those who may have already applied or obtained it. More information about sampling can be found in the technical annex (Annex A).

Throughout this report, results are presented for two key analytical groups: “those on routes to settlement” and “those on Student or Graduate routes”. These groupings are based on sample information, which was also used to weight the data. The “routes to settlement” group comprises respondents sampled from visa and protection routes that qualify for settlement, listed above. The “Student and Graduate routes” group includes respondents sampled from Student or Graduate visa routes, as although these do not constitute direct pathways to settlement, Visa Holders often transition onto a route that has a direct pathway to settlement. The visa or protection route respondents held at the point of completing the survey may, in some cases, have differed from the

route held at the time of sampling, for example when Visa Holders transitioned from one visa to another.

It was also not possible to obtain accurate population data for those who had transitioned to settlement in recent years, as this is a moving population.

As a result of these limitations, the most appropriate approach was to split “those on routes to settlement” and “those on Student or Graduate routes” in order to weight the data.

Interpreting the report and methodology

The following definitions and conventions clarify how key terms and groupings are used to support consistent interpretation of findings.

- References to those on ‘routes to settlement’ and those on ‘Student or Graduate routes’ correspond to the analytical groupings used throughout the report. These terms are used for consistency when presenting findings and interpreting differences between groups.

- Throughout this report, we use the term ‘individuals with protection status’ to refer to individuals granted protection under the UK asylum system, including refugee status and humanitarian protection, as well as related forms of leave (for example, discretionary leave granted on protection grounds where applicable). Where appropriate, the term ‘protection route’ may also be used to refer to these groups more generally, rather than to individuals directly.

- Within the group described as being on ‘routes to settlement’, respondents who are not included in the protection group are referred to as Visa Holders.

It is also important to note when reading this report that minor discrepancies between combined figures presented in charts and those referenced in accompanying text callouts may occur. These differences arise from rounding the individual values, which can result in small variations when totals are aggregated.

The survey results should be interpreted with some caution, due to both potential response bias and differences between the survey sample and the wider migrant population. The sample was drawn from Home Office administrative records, and included individuals who had previously agreed to be contacted for research purposes and whose contact details were held within Home Office systems.

The sample was stratified by immigration route. Given wide variation in route sizes, and the need for a minimum number of responses by route to allow analysis, people on some routes were more likely to be invited to participate. Individuals with stronger views, greater interest in the topic, or more developed future plans may have been more likely to participate in the research.

The survey was conducted following publication of the Immigration White Paper and during a period of significant public discussion regarding proposed changes to settlement policy. Awareness of the proposed reforms was high among respondents, particularly amongst those on work-related routes and those closer to settlement eligibility. Individuals who believed the

proposals could affect their future immigration status may have been more likely to respond to the survey.

Responses also capture views and intentions at a specific point in time. These may change as circumstances evolve, including in response to personal circumstances, eligibility requirements, and changes to the immigration system. In addition, reported intentions to apply for settlement are higher than historically observed settlement rates, reflecting differences between stated intentions and realised outcomes, as well as potential response and sampling effects.

Recent findings from the Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) using linked Home Office administrative datasets, found that between 74% and 85% of Skilled Worker migrants continued to hold valid immigration status 5 years after arrival, with some variation by arrival cohort[2]. These observed retention rates are notably lower than the proportions of Visa Holders in this survey expressing intentions to apply for settlement. While the two measures are not directly comparable, the difference suggests that stated intentions may overstate eventual long-term settlement outcomes, reflecting both the inherent uncertainty of future decision-making, and the possibility that individuals with stronger intentions to remain in the UK were more likely to participate in the survey.

The findings should therefore be understood as a snapshot of respondents' perspectives at the time of the survey rather than necessarily a prediction of future behaviour or outcomes. Many respondents reported considering multiple future options, further suggesting that their plans and intentions remain subject to change.

Outputs

Cleaned and weighted datasets and data tables were produced and provided to Home Office analysts, following completion of robust quality assurance checks.

This report presents key findings from the survey of current and former UK visa and protection route holders. It details:

- The demographic profile and characteristics of survey respondents, including visa and route status;
- Awareness of settlement policy;
- Intentions to apply for settlement;
- Plans following settlement; and
- Awareness of, and response to, proposed changes to settlement policy, including potential impacts on settlement intentions and future decision-making.

[22] Who stays, who leaves? Evidence from the Skilled Worker route - GOV.UK

Respondent profile and characteristics

Table 1 to Table 6 display breakdowns of survey respondents by key characteristics, including visa status, employment and financial circumstances, qualification level and English language proficiency.

Table 1. Respondent profile: status in the UK, route to settlement and dependant status

Status in the UK	**% of total**	**n**
Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR)	15%	691
UK Visa Holder	74%	3,505
Protection status	11%	532
Route to settlement	**% of total**	**n**
Asylum or Humanitarian route	11%	507
BN(O)	8%	380
Skilled Worker	12%	551
Skilled Worker Health and Care	16%	770
Family (Partner and Private Life)	13%	626
Global Talent	7%	346
UK Ancestry	6%	295
Student	3%	157
Graduate	3%	165
Minister of Religion	4%	174
Other visa or protection route	1%	52
Settlement status / Indefinite Leave to Remain	15%	705
Dependant status	**% of total**	**n**
NET: Has dependants on visa	43%	2,038
NET: Has child(/ren) on visa	32%	1,499
No dependants	57%	2,690

Base: All (4,728).

Table 2. Respondent profile: Employment status and income

Employment status	**% of total**	**n**
NET: Employed	78%	3,699
NET: Not employed	20%	937
Prefer not to say	2%	84
Don't know	0%	8
Annual taxable income	**% of those employed and know their personal income**	**n**
Less than £12,500	10%	364
£12,500-£49,999	58%	2,033
£50,000-£124,999	14%	501
£125,000 or more	2%	86
Don't know / prefer not to say	15%	534

Base: All (4,728) and All those employed and know their personal income (3,518).

Table 3. Respondent profile: Qualification level and English language proficiency

Qualification Level (RQF)	**% of total**	**n**
NET: Level 6+	70%	3,326
NET: Below Level 6	30%	1,402
NET: Level 3+	84%	3,989
NET: Level 1+	93%	4,399
No formal qualifications	7%	329
English language qualification	**% of total**	**n**
Native speaker or bilingual	35%	1,671
NET: Proficient / advanced – C	26%	1,226
NET: Intermediate – B	21%	1,014
NET: Beginner / elementary – A	3%	138
No English qualification	8%	355
Don't know / prefer not to say	7%	324

Base: All (4,728).

Table 4: Respondent profile: Other countries considered.

Did they consider moving to other countries?	% of total	n
Yes	35%	1,658
No	59%	2,780
Don’t know / prefer not to say	6%	290
Countries considered moving to	**% of those who considered moving to a country other than the UK**	**n**
Canada	32%	526
United States	29%	473
Australia	28%	460
Germany	13%	223
Netherlands	7%	123
New Zealand	7%	115
Ireland	5%	85
France	5%	84
Spain	3%	58
Switzerland	3%	53
United Arab Emirates	3%	51
Taiwan	3%	48

Base: All (4,728) and Those who considered moving to a country other than the UK (1,658) (Respondents could select up to 3 options).

Table 5: Respondent profile: dependent characteristics

Partner or parent of a British citizen	% of total	n
I am a Partner of a British citizen	19%	879
I am a Parent of a British citizen	11%	521
Neither of the above	75%	3,551
NET: Partner/parent of British citizen	25%	1,177
Partner employment status	**% of those who have a dependent partner**	**n**
Employed full-time (30 or more hours per week)	51%	651
Employed part-time (fewer than 30 hours per week)	9%	120
Self-employed	6%	75
Undertaking voluntary work	3%	41
Looking for work	9%	115
Studying/gaining additional qualifications	5%	62
Not working or looking for work, e.g. looking after household	11%	141
Something else	1%	12
Prefer not to say	5%	59
NET: Employed	66%	846
NET: Not employed	28%	359
Partner gross annual income before tax and deductions	**% of those who have a dependent partner**	**n**
£17,500 or less	13%	112
£17,501 to £20,000	6%	49
£20,001 to £22,500	7%	56
£22,501 to £25,000	13%	113
£25,001 to £30,000	23%	197
£30,001 to £35,000	10%	81
£35,001 to £40,000	7%	58
£40,001 to £45,000	3%	25
£45,001 to £50,000	2%	20
£50,001 to £75,000	7%	57
£75,001 to £100,000	2%	18
Over £100,000	2%	13
Prefer not to say	5%	40
NET: More than £17,500	81%	687
NET: £50,000 or below	84%	711
NET: Over £50,000	10%	88

Base: All (4,728) and All current UK visa holders or those currently on a protection route who have a partner as a dependant (1276) and All current UK Visa Holders or those currently on a protection route whose partners are employed or self-employed (846).

Table 6: Respondent details. Time in UK and whether in a vulnerable group

Time in UK	**% of total**	**n**
12 months or less	7%	354
More than 12 months and up to 5 years	66%	3,130
More than 5 years, up to 10 years	16%	733
More than 10 years	11%	511
NET: More than a year	93%	4,374
NET: More than 5 years	26%	1,244
Part of a vulnerable group	**% of total**	**n**
Yes	8%	363
No	85%	4,042
Don’t know / prefer not to say	7%	323

Base: All (4,728).

Chapter 2: Settlement intentions

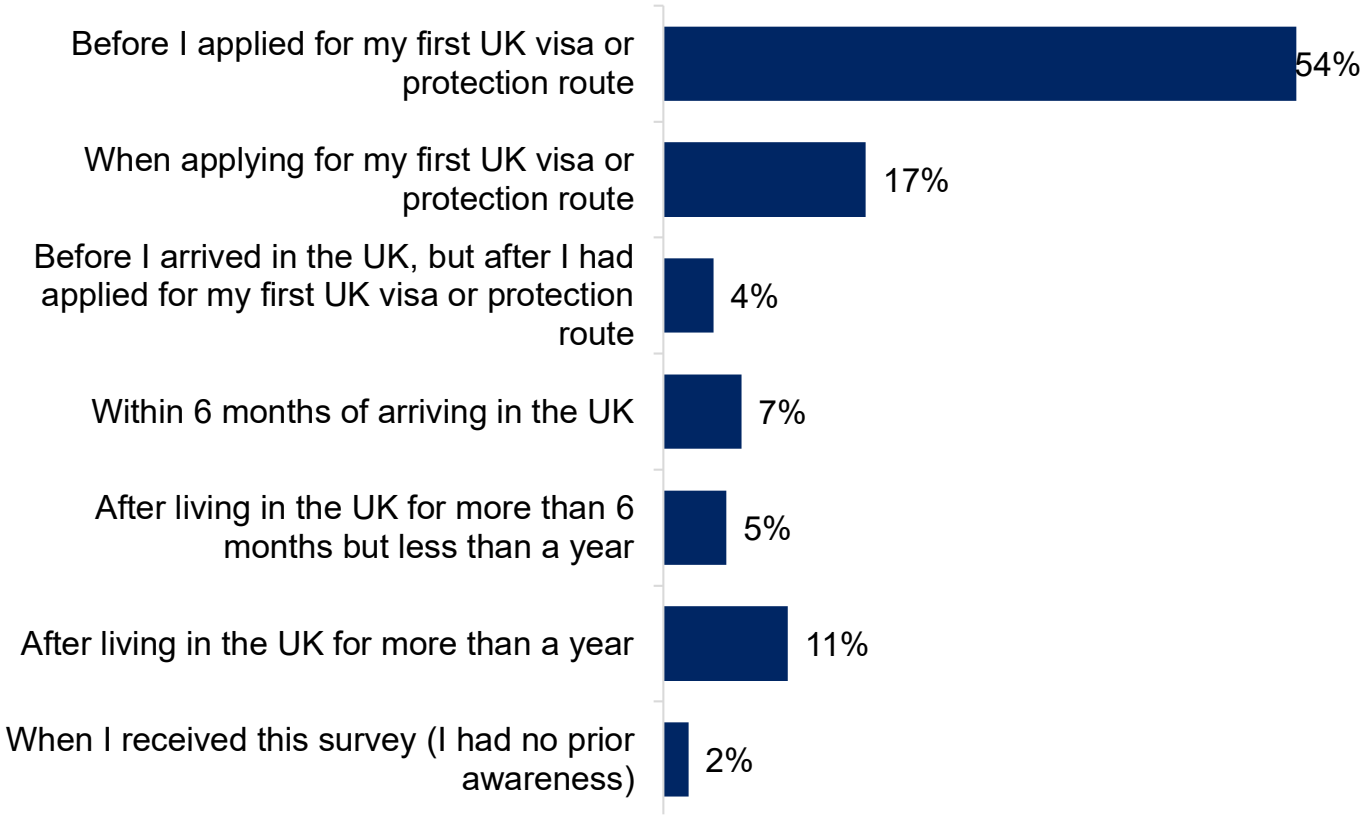
Chapter introduction

This chapter examines awareness of settlement, intentions to apply for settlement, and the role that settlement plays in migration decision-making among current and former UK visa and protection route holders.

Awareness, consideration and intentions to apply for settlement

Awareness of ILR/settlement among those on a route to settlement was almost universal, with 98% reporting that they were aware of it prior to completing the survey (Figure 1). For most, this awareness developed early: 75% reported first becoming aware before arriving in the UK, and 54% were already aware prior to applying for their first visa or protection route. This suggests wide awareness of settlement as part of the UK immigration system, often before individuals begin their migration journey.

Figure 1: First awareness of settlement



Base: Routes to settlement: B1, All UK Visa Holders or those on a protection route (3,481).

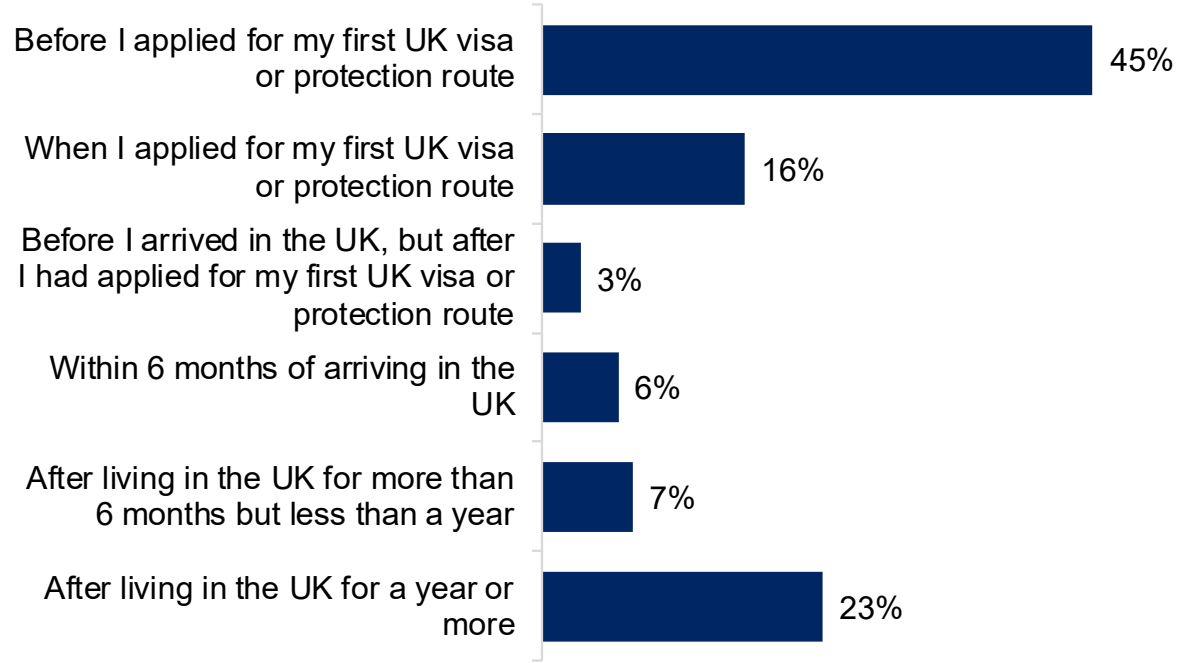
However, the timing of awareness varies considerably across groups, pointing to differences in how individuals engage with the system. Visa Holders were substantially more likely to have been

aware of settlement before arriving in the UK (78%) compared to individuals with protection status (34%). This likely reflects the more structured nature of visa routes, compared with the less planned and more uncertain pathways associated with protection routes. Having awareness 'before arriving in the UK' includes individuals who may already have applied for or held a visa or protection route status, as well as those who had not. Higher levels of early awareness were also observed among higher earning respondents, with 80% of those earning £50,000 or more reporting awareness prior to arrival. While most Visa Holders reported that they considered applying for settlement either before or at the point of application, it is notable that nearly a quarter (23%) only did so after a year or more.

Variation is also evident by visa route. BN(O) Visa Holders were more likely than average to be aware of settlement before applying for their first UK visa or protection route (78%) indicating awareness before any interaction with the UK immigration system. Similarly, awareness was relatively high among those on the Skilled Worker Health and Care route (67%). In contrast, individuals on asylum or humanitarian routes were much less likely to report awareness at this stage (13%).

Awareness of settlement is closely followed by active consideration of applying. Among those who were aware, 94% reported that they had considered applying for settlement (Figure 2), indicating that awareness almost always translates into engagement with the idea of long-term stay. For many, this consideration occurs early in the migration process: 64% reported first considering applying before arriving in the UK. This was particularly pronounced among BN(O) Visa Holders (92%), reinforcing the role of settlement as a central feature of decision-making for some routes.

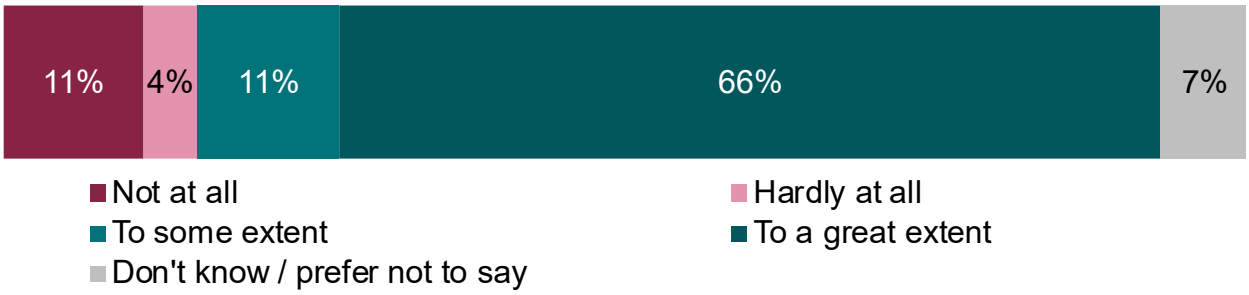
Figure 2: First consideration of applying for settlement



Base: Routes to settlement: B3A, All current UK Visa Holders or those on a protection route who have considered applying for settlement (3,186).

The influence of settlement on initial decision-making is moderate. Overall, 35% of those on a route to settlement and 26% of those on a Student or Graduate visa stated that their decision to come to the UK was to 'some' or 'a great extent' influenced by the ability to apply for settlement. However, among those on routes to settlement who had considered applying for settlement before or at the point of applying for their visa, the opportunity to apply for settlement in future was a significant factor in their decision to come to the UK, with 77% of this smaller subgroup reporting it influenced their decision to 'some' or a 'great extent' (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Whether ability to apply for settlement influenced initial decision to come to the UK

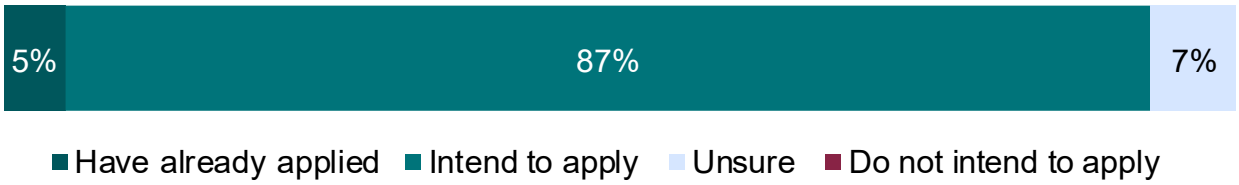


Base: Routes to settlement: B3B, all current UK Visa Holders or those currently on a protection route who considered applying for settlement before or when they applied for their visa (2,010).

This influence was especially pronounced among certain groups. Among Skilled Worker Visa Holders, almost all (93%) of those who considered applying for settlement before or when they applied for their visa reported that the prospect of settlement played a role, at least to some extent, in their decision-making. A similar proportion (92%) of those who had also considered migrating to another country agreed, suggesting that access to settlement may act as a competitive advantage for the UK in attracting migrants.

Only 8% of care workers and senior care workers said that the ability to apply for settlement had 'hardly' influenced, or had 'not at all' influenced, their decision to come to the UK, compared with 16% of respondents overall. Once settlement has been considered, intentions to apply are consistently high. Among those on routes to settlement who had considered applying at any point, most (92%) reported that they had either already applied for settlement or intended to do so (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Intention to apply for settlement among those who have considered applying

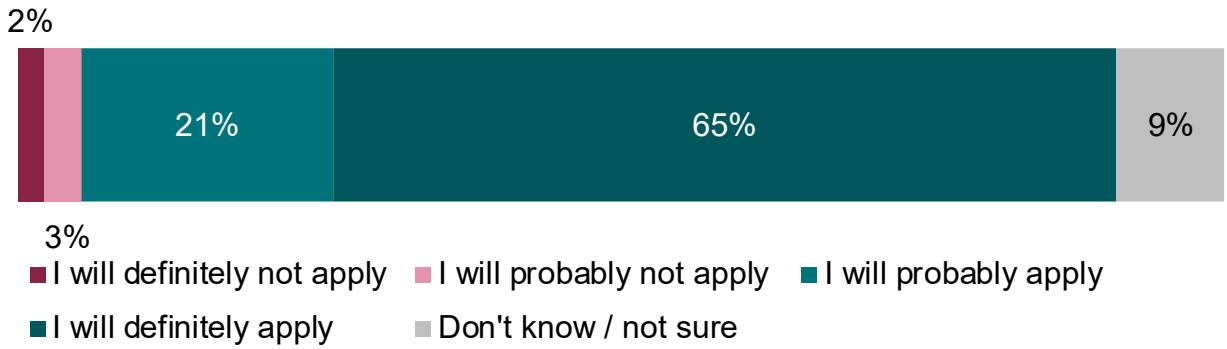


Base: Routes to settlement: B4, All current UK Visa Holders or those currently on a protection route who have considered applying for settlement (3,186).

A higher proportion of care workers and senior care workers indicated that they intended to apply for settlement (91%) compared with respondents overall (87%). However, a smaller proportion

had already submitted a settlement application (2%, compared with 5% overall). Amongst those who had not yet applied but had considered settlement, a large majority (87%) reported that they probably or definitely would apply under the current rules (Figure 5). In contrast, only 4% said that they probably or definitely would not apply, while 9% were uncertain.

Figure 5: Likelihood of applying for settlement under the current rules



Base: Routes to settlement: C1, All current UK Visa Holders or those currently on a protection route who have not already applied for settlement but who had considered it at some point as an option for remaining in the UK (3,070).

Compared with respondents overall, care workers and senior care workers appeared less certain about their settlement intentions. They were more likely to say that they would probably apply for settlement under the current rules (27% compared with 21% overall) and less likely to say that they would definitely apply (58% compared with 65% overall).

Alternative options, contingency planning and reasons for these

Those unsure or not intending to apply for settlement

Uncertainty or reluctance to apply for settlement is closely associated with active consideration of alternative options. Among those on routes to settlement who were not planning to apply for settlement, or were unsure, 81% were considering other options. Of these, 53% were considering leaving the UK, while 45% were considering staying by applying for an extension, switching to a different visa or protection route, or pursuing another option for remaining in the UK.

The likelihood of considering departure varied across groups. Individuals with protection status were much less likely to report considering leaving the UK (21%) than average, indicating fewer viable or desirable alternatives outside the UK for this group. Care workers and senior care workers were less likely to report considering other options to remain in the UK (31%). Overall, this pattern suggests that uncertainty about settlement often reflects a broader reassessment of future plans rather than a single decision point.

Those intending to apply for settlement but considering alternatives

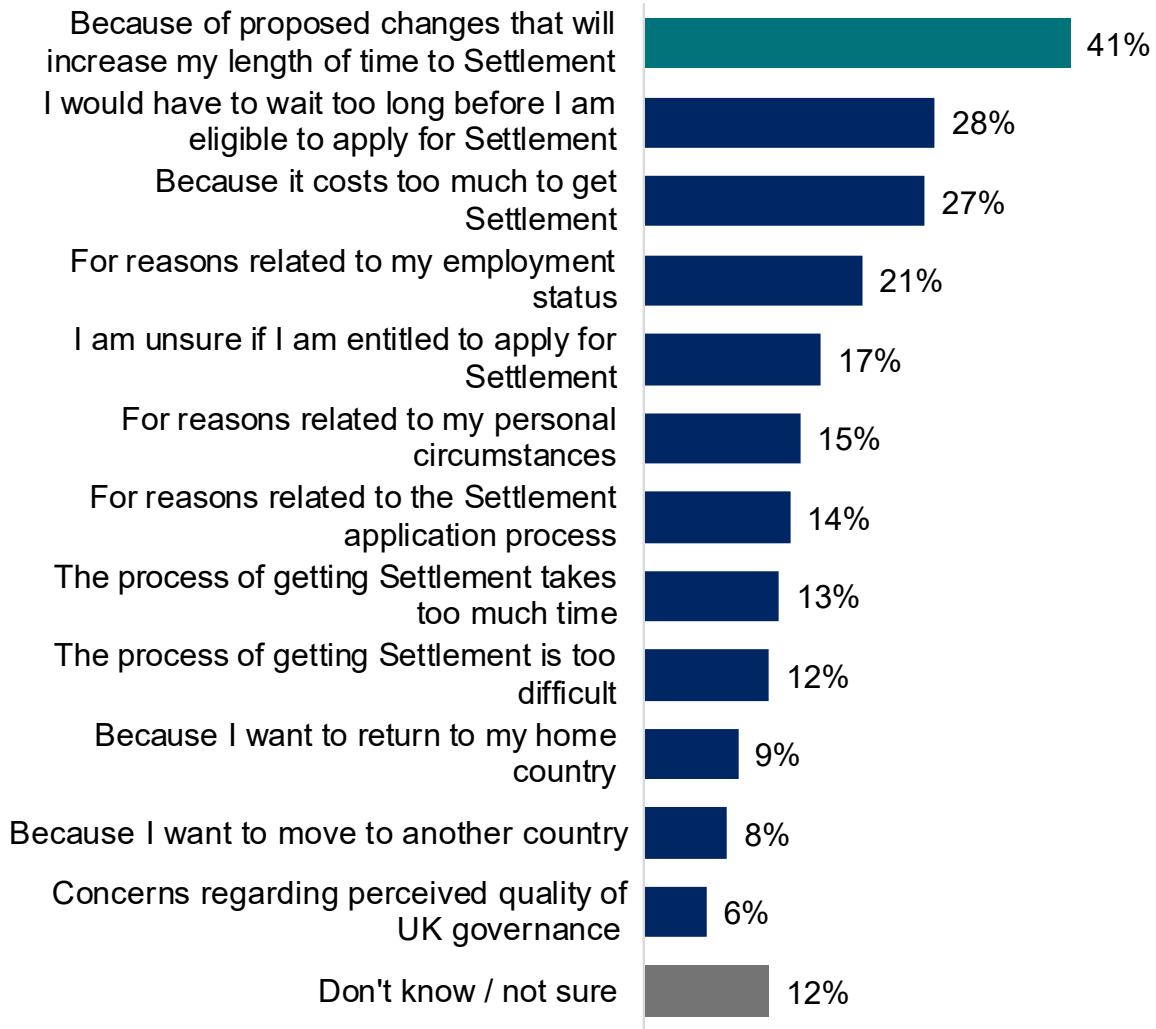
Even among those who intend to apply for settlement, contingency planning was common. Over half (56%) reported considering alternative ways to remain in the UK, such as extending their visa or switching routes. In addition, 22% were considering options that included leaving the UK alongside their plans to apply for settlement. This was notably higher among those who had

previously considered migrating to another country (42%) and lower amongst care workers and senior care workers (15%).

At the same time, a minority (19%) reported that they were not considering any options beyond applying for settlement. This proportion increased to 31% among those who were closer to eligibility (with less than one year remaining or already eligible).

Decisions to pursue alternatives were primarily driven by uncertainty around the settlement process itself. Among those who were unsure or did not intend to apply, most (76%) cited factors related to the time required to qualify for settlement or the requirements of the application process (Figure 6). Personal or economic circumstances were mentioned less frequently overall (30%), suggesting that structural aspects of the system play a larger role in shaping uncertainty. However, a greater proportion of care workers and senior care workers stated that personal or economic circumstances were a factor (45%).

Figure 6: Reasons for not, or uncertainty about, applying for settlement



Base: Routes to settlement: B6, All current UK Visa Holders or those currently on a protection route who are unsure or not intending to apply for settlement (452). Respondents could select more than one option.

Potential changes to the system also appear to influence decision-making. Around 41% of this group identified increases in the length of time required to qualify for settlement as a contributing factor.

A similar pattern was evident among those on routes to settlement who were considering applying for settlement alongside other options. In this group, 61% reported that they were considering alternative options primarily due to the timescale and requirements of the application process, compared with 29% who viewed other options as a back-up and 22% who cited personal or economic circumstances.

Taken together, these findings suggest that consideration of alternative options is not limited to those who are disengaging from settlement. Rather, it reflects a broader strategy of contingency planning, particularly in response to the perceived complexity, duration, and uncertainty of the settlement process.

Chapter 2 Summary

Awareness of settlement was near-universal among those on routes to settlement and typically established at an early stage, often before arrival in the UK. Most who were aware of settlement had considered applying for it, and for many this consideration pre-dated arrival. The ability to apply for settlement was commonly reported as influencing decisions to come to the UK, although the strength of this influence varied by route, with some groups placing greater emphasis on settlement as part of their initial decision-making.

Overall, intentions to apply for settlement under current rules were high, though levels of certainty varied, and were particularly dependent on proximity to eligibility and individual circumstances. Many individuals considered alternative options, including extending their stay, switching routes, or leaving the UK. This reflects a broader pattern of contingency planning in response to perceived requirements, settlement timeframes, and personal or economic considerations.

Chapter 3: Awareness and impact of proposed changes to the current settlement framework

Chapter introduction

This chapter explores the awareness of proposed changes to the settlement framework, as well as the anticipated impacts of these proposed changes on visa and protection route holders' intentions to settle in the UK. It sets out intentions under the current framework, then explores impacts of various proposed changes on intentions to settle. This also includes impacts relating to visa or protection route movement, labour market activity, English language proficiency, and welfare claims.

Settlement intentions under the current framework

As noted in Chapter 2, most individuals on routes to settlement who had not yet applied indicated a clear intention to do so under the current rules: 87% said they would definitely or probably apply under the existing framework, 4% said they probably or definitely would not apply, while 9% were unsure. This indicates a strong underlying demand for settlement under the existing framework.

Reported intentions to apply for settlement are higher than historically observed settlement rates. As discussed in the methods section, this may reflect differences between stated intentions and realised outcomes, as well as potential response and sampling effects. Although intentions to settle were high, many respondents also reported considering alternative options, indicating continued uncertainty about future eligibility, requirements, and system changes.

Within this overall strong demand for settlement under the current framework, intentions vary across visa status and type. Visa Holders were slightly more likely than individuals with protection status to report they were likely to apply for settlement (87% vs 81%). BN(O) (91%) and Skilled Worker (92%) Visa Holders were more likely than average (87%) to indicate they would probably or definitely apply to settle. Those holding Skilled Worker (Health and Care) visas were notably less likely than Skilled Worker Visa Holders to say they would apply (81% compared to 92%).

Despite this, care workers and senior care workers were not significantly more or less likely than average to indicate they would apply for settlement under the current rules. 86% said they would probably or definitely apply, compared with 3% who said they probably or definitely would not.

A clear socio-economic gradient was also evident. Higher earners, those with higher qualification levels, and those with greater English language proficiency were all more likely to report that they would apply for settlement. The vast majority of those on a route to settlement who earned over £50,000 reported they would definitely or probably apply (91%). Those earning £100,000 or more were especially likely to intend to apply (95%). A smaller proportion of those earning between £12,500 and £49,999 said they intended to apply (86%). It is worth noting that those earning £12,500 to £49,999 annually made up over half (53%) of the respondent cohort, while those

earning £50,000 or more made up a smaller proportion (17%), and those earning £100,000 or more annually only made up 3%.

Similarly, individuals with higher qualifications were more likely to intend to settle. Those holding a Level 6 qualification or higher under the Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF) (equivalent to honours degree level) were more likely than those holding Level 4 and 5 qualifications to intend to apply (88% compared to 82%). For reference, most (62%) of the respondent cohort held Level 6 qualifications or above, while 12% held Level 4-5 qualifications.

Of those on routes to settlement, Native English speakers (89%) and those who speak English very or fairly well (87%) were more likely than those who speak it not well or not at all (73%) to intend to apply under current rules. Most respondents (63%) reported speaking English 'Very or fairly well', followed by those who speak English as a first language (33%). Only 3% reported not speaking English well, or at all.

Taken together, these patterns suggest that intention to settle is strongest among higher earners, and those with higher qualification and English proficiency levels. These characteristics broadly align with those eligible for reductions under the proposed Earned Settlement framework. Despite clear variation by socioeconomic characteristic, appetite for settlement remained high across the board.

These findings should be interpreted in the context of the cohort sizes detailed above, as the absolute number of individuals intending to settle may be greater among larger groups (such as lower earners or those with intermediate English proficiency), even where the proportions are lower compared to those in smaller, higher-earning or highly qualified cohorts.

Awareness of proposed changes

This section discusses awareness of proposed changes to the current settlement framework and baseline qualifying period among Visa Holders and those on a protection route.

Awareness of proposed changes to the current settlement framework was strong. A high proportion (79%) of those on routes to settlement were aware of proposed changes to the framework or standard 5-year qualifying period. This compared to 21% who were not aware. This suggests that information about the proposed reforms has reached a substantial majority of the relevant population.

However, awareness varied across groups. Visa Holders were more likely than individuals with protection status to report awareness (80% compared with 71%), indicating somewhat lower levels of engagement or access to information among those in protection-based statuses.

Differences were also evident by visa type. Awareness was particularly high among those on routes typically associated with clearer or more structured pathways to settlement. Those holding BN(O) (94%), Skilled Worker (Health and Care) (93%) and Skilled Worker (90%) visas were all more likely than overall (79%) to have heard of any of the proposed changes to the settlement framework. Conversely, those on Family visa routes (66%) and Asylum or Humanitarian routes (72%) were less likely to report awareness.

Awareness also appeared to be linked to the importance individuals placed on settlement. Of those on a route to settlement who reported that their decision to come to the UK was influenced by the opportunity to settle, 90% had heard of the changes. This compares with 71% among those who said their decision to come to the UK was not influenced by settlement. This pattern suggests that individuals who are more motivated by long-term settlement outcomes may be more likely to seek out or engage with information about policy changes.

A similar relationship is seen with proximity to eligibility for settlement. Those who were closer to eligibility for settlement under the current framework were also more likely to be aware of the proposed changes. Among those with more than one but fewer than 5 years remaining until eligibility, 81% were aware of the proposed changes, compared with 70% of those who had more than 5 years to wait. This may reflect increased attention to policy developments as individuals approach key decision points in their migration journey.

Overall, awareness of the proposed changes appears to be shaped by both proximity to settlement and the perceived importance of settlement in original migration decisions.

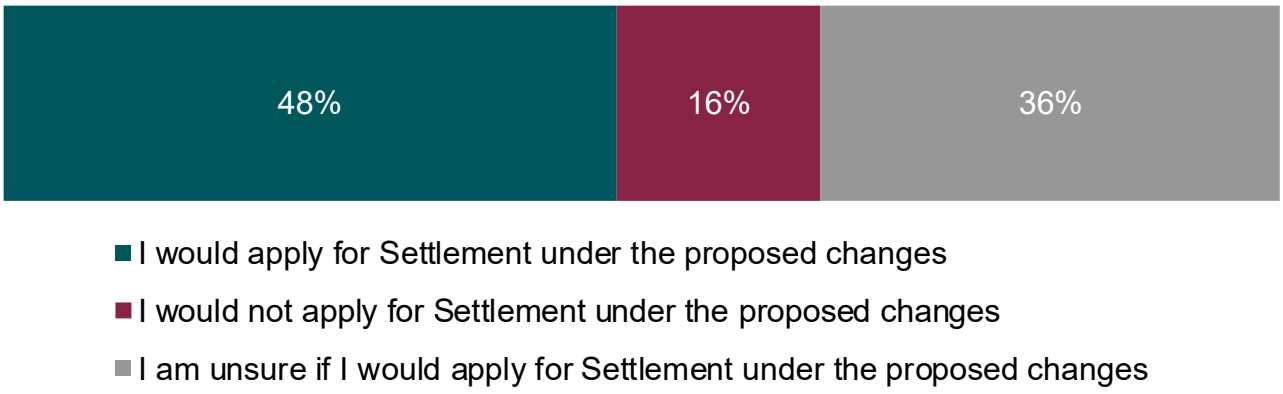
Overall impacts of proposed changes to settlement

The proposed changes to settlement may have a strong bearing on settlement intentions. Overall, findings suggest that fewer Visa Holders and individuals on protection routes may apply for settlement under an Earned Settlement model compared with the current system. It is worth noting the survey reports future intentions, which may not necessarily be borne out in practice. Findings should be interpreted with this in mind.

Hypothetical impacts of an Earned Settlement system for those who have not yet applied for ILR

Among those who had not yet applied for ILR when surveyed, only a relatively small proportion said they would not apply for settlement if the proposed changes came into effect (16%). It was most common (48%) for Visa Holders and individuals with protection status to say they would apply for settlement under the new framework. 36% were unsure, indicating a notable degree of uncertainty, even among those already on a pathway to settlement (Figure 7).

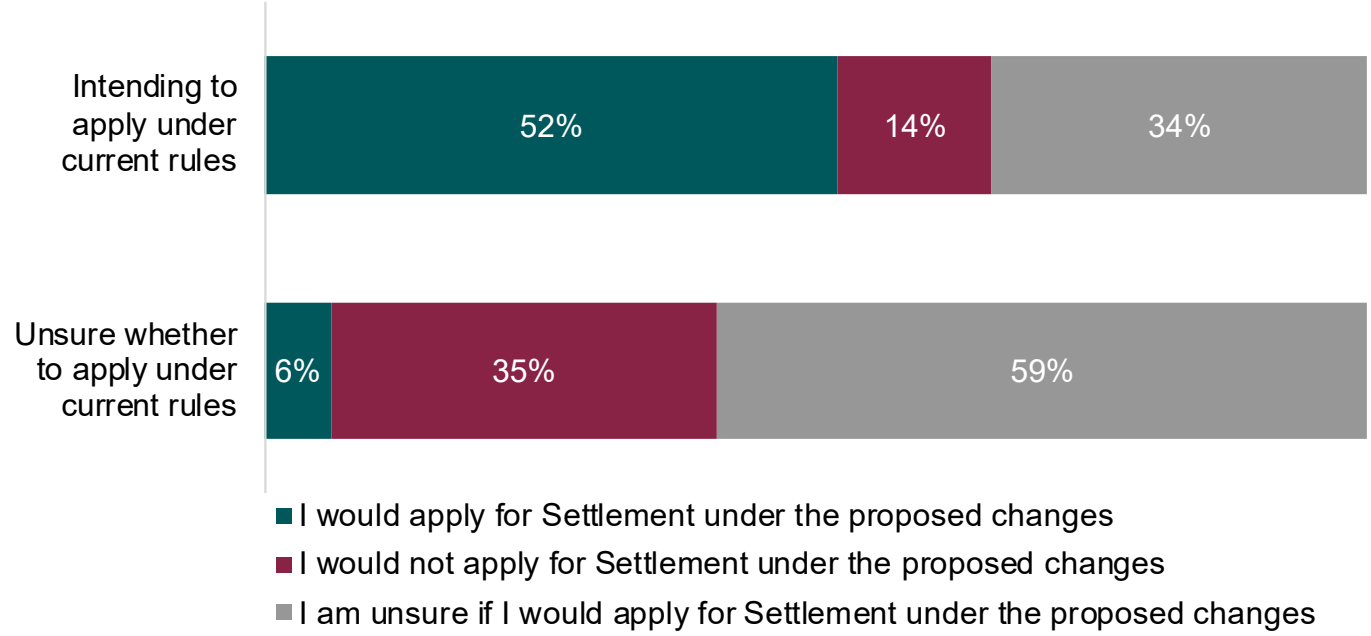
Figure 7: Impact of Earned Settlement framework on intentions to settle



Base: Routes to Settlement: B8/B8a/B8b, All current UK Visa Holders or those on a protection route who have not already applied for settlement but who were aware of it before the survey (3,267).

As shown in Figure 8 below, the impact of proposed changes on intentions to apply for settlement varied based on stated likelihood to apply under the current rules.

Figure 8: Impact of Earned Settlement framework, by current settlement intentions



Base: Routes to Settlement: B8/B8a/B8b, All current UK Visa Holders or those on a protection route who have not already applied for settlement but who were aware of it before the survey, and who intend to apply under current rules (2,815) or are unsure whether to apply under current rules (231).

Intentions under the proposed framework were closely linked to individuals' existing settlement plans. Among those who had previously indicated they were likely to apply under the current rules, just over half (52%) said they would still apply under an Earned Settlement framework. However, the remainder expressed either uncertainty (34%) or an intention not to apply (14%),

suggesting that the proposed changes could cause some who planned to settle to question, or reverse their plans.

Of those who were unsure about applying for settlement under the current rules, 59% said they would still be unsure under the new framework. 35% said they would not apply, while 6% said they would.

The impact of the proposed changes was not uniform across groups. Higher-skilled and higher-earning individuals, as well as those on work-related visa routes, were more likely than average to report that the changes would affect their intentions. The following groups were all more likely than average to say the proposed changes would or might change their settlement intentions: those holding Skilled Worker, Skilled Worker (Health and Care), Global Talent and BN(O) visas; care workers and senior care workers; those earning £50,000 or more; and those holding RQF Level 6+ qualifications. Over half of individuals in each of these groups said the changes would or might alter their plans. These findings are presented in Table 7.

Table 7: Impact of proposed changes on current settlement intentions

Respondent group (Routes to Settlement)	Would or might change intentions	Would not change intentions
Overall	**49%**	**51%**
Skilled Worker (Health and Care) Visa Holder	69% (+)	31% (-)
Skilled Worker Visa Holder	62% (+)	38% (-)
Global Talent Visa Holder	58% (+)	42% (-)
BN(O) Visa Holder	57% (+)	43% (-)
Care workers and senior care workers	65% (+)	35% (-)
Those earning over £50,000	56% (+)	44% (-)
Those with RQF Level 6+ qualifications	54% (+)	46% (-)

Base: Routes to Settlement: B8/8a/8b, Skilled Worker (391), Skilled Worker (Health and Care) (710), Global Talent (324), BN(O) (374), Care workers and senior care workers (388), Earning £50,000+ (659). All groups have not applied for settlement but were aware of it before the survey. (+)/(-) Indicates significantly higher/lower than overall.

These groups were also all less likely than average to say they would apply for settlement under the proposed Earned Settlement framework, with larger-than-average proportions saying they would not apply or that they were unsure (Table 8). This pattern suggests that the proposed reforms may particularly affect groups who are currently more engaged with the labour market and who might otherwise be expected to transition into settlement.

Table 8: Settlement intentions under Earned Settlement framework

Respondent group (Routes to Settlement)	Would apply	Would not apply	Unsure
Overall	**48%**	**16%**	**36%**
Skilled Worker (Health and Care) Visa Holder	27% (-)	28% (+)	46% (+)
Skilled Worker Visa Holder	32% (-)	24% (+)	44% (+)
Global Talent Visa Holder	30% (-)	28% (+)	42% (+)
BN(O) Visa Holder	41% (-)	18%	42% (+)
Care workers and senior care workers	36% (-)	18%	46% (+)
Those earning over £50,000	40% (-)	21% (+)	39% (+)
Those with RQF Level 6+ qualifications	41% (-)	19% (+)	40% (+)

Base: Routes to Settlement: B8/8a/8b, Skilled Worker (391), Skilled Worker (Health and Care) (710), Global Talent (324), BN(O) (374), Care workers and senior care workers (388), Earning £50,000+ (659). All groups have not applied for settlement but were aware of it before the survey. (+)/(-)Indicates significantly higher/lower than overall.

However, some groups are unlikely to be affected by the longer proposed standard qualifying periods. For example, higher rate income taxpayers (those earning over £50,270 for over 3 years) would have a 5-year qualifying period. Additional rate income taxpayers (earning over £125,140) would have a 3-year qualifying period. As such, while those earning over £50,000 reported they would be less likely than average to apply for settlement if the standard qualifying period was 10 years rather than 5, they are unlikely to be subject to this extended qualifying period.

Conversely, care workers and senior care workers would be subject to a 15-year standard qualifying period if the proposed changes came into effect, and would be less likely than average to apply for settlement under an Earned Settlement framework.

The following groups were all more likely than average to say the proposed changes would not change their settlement intentions: those on Asylum or Humanitarian Routes, those holding Family visas, those whose decisions to come to the UK were not influenced by settlement, those holding RQF Level 1-3 or no formal qualifications, and those not in employment. These results are presented in Table 9.

Table 9: Impact of proposed changes on current settlement intentions

Respondent group (Routes to Settlement)	Would or might change intentions	Would not change intentions
Overall	**49%**	**51%**
Asylum or Humanitarian Routes	27% (-)	73% (+)
Family Visa Holder	34% (-)	66% (+)
Decision to come to UK not influenced by settlement	34% (-)	66% (+)
Those with RQF Level 1-3 qualifications	36% (-)	64% (+)
Those with no formal qualifications	37% (-)	63% (+)
Those not in employment	35% (-)	66% (+)

Base: Routes to Settlement: B8/8a/8b, Asylum or Humanitarian Routes (443), Family Visa Holder (527), Decision to come to UK not influenced by settlement (227), RQF Level 1-3 (408), No formal qualifications (190), Not in employment (589). All groups have not applied for settlement but were aware of it before the survey. (+)/(-)Indicates significantly higher/lower than overall.

The groups presented in Table 9 were all more likely than average to say they would apply for settlement if the proposed changes came into effect (Table 10). For example, those on Asylum or Humanitarian routes showed particularly strong continued intent to apply, alongside relatively low levels of uncertainty or intention not to apply. This suggests that for these groups, settlement intentions may be less sensitive to changes in the structure or requirements of the system.

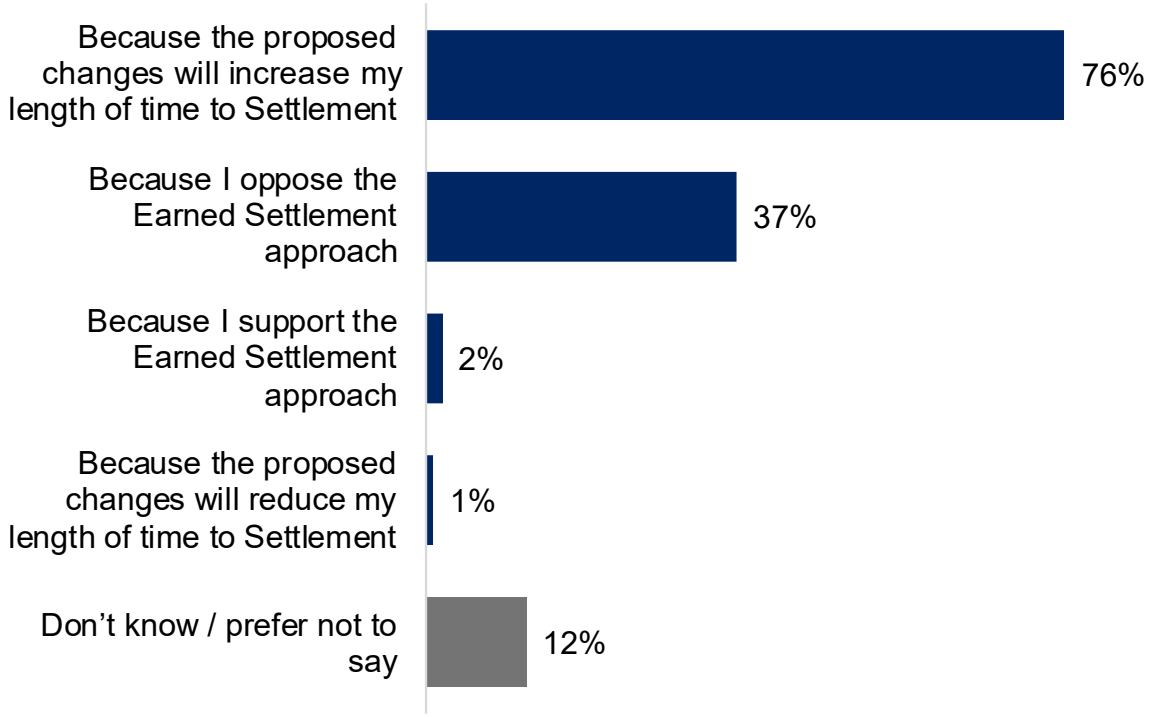
Table 10: Settlement intentions under Earned Settlement framework

Respondent group (Routes to Settlement)	Would apply	Would not apply	Unsure
Overall	**48%**	**16%**	**36%**
Asylum or Humanitarian Routes	77% (+)	4% (-)	19% (-)
Family Visa Holder	65% (+)	8% (-)	28% (-)
Decision to come to UK not influenced by settlement	62% (+)	10% (-)	28% (-)
Those with RQF Level 1-3 qualifications	65% (+)	6% (-)	29% (-)
Those with no formal qualifications	71% (+)	7% (-)	21% (-)
Those not in employment	62% (+)	9% (-)	29% (-)

Base: Routes to Settlement: B8/8a/8b, Asylum or Humanitarian Routes (443), Family Visa Holder (527), Decision to come to UK not influenced by settlement (227), RQF Level 1-3 (408), No formal qualifications (190), Not in employment (589). All groups have not applied for settlement but were aware of it before the survey. (+)/(-)Indicates significantly higher/lower than overall.

Those on routes to settlement who would or might change their mind most commonly (76%) said this was because the proposed changes would increase the length of time to settlement (Figure 9). Opposition to the Earned Settlement approach was the second most prominent reason Visa Holders and those on protection routes indicated they would or might change their mind (40%).

Figure 9: Reasons for changes to Settlement intentions under an Earned Settlement framework



Base: Routes to Settlement: B9, All who would/might change settlement intentions (1,632). Respondents could select more than one option.

There was some variation in reasoning based on visa type. Those on Skilled Worker visas were more likely than average to say their intentions would or might change due to an increase in length of time to settlement (88% compared to 76% overall). There was no comparable significant difference among those holding Skilled Worker Health and Care visas (78%). BN(O) Visa Holders were much more likely to say their intentions would change because they oppose the Earned Settlement approach more generally, with 54% sharing this view.

Overall, the findings suggest that the proposed Earned Settlement framework may reduce certainty around settlement pathways, particularly among those who would otherwise expect to apply. While around half indicated they would still apply, a substantial proportion were uncertain or indicated that they would not proceed. This effect was most pronounced amongst higher-skilled and higher-earning groups, for whom increased time to settlement appeared to be key in terms of changing intentions.

Impacts relating to an extended baseline qualifying period

When asked about whether they would have chosen to come to the UK if the standard qualifying period for settlement had been 10 years, rather than five, opinion was fragmented, with no overall majority. A total of 37% of those on a route to settlement said they would have chosen to come to the UK even if the standard qualifying period for settlement had been 10 years. A similar proportion (38%) said they would not have come to the UK, while 24% were unsure.

Care workers and senior care workers were more likely than average to say they would not have come to the UK if the standard qualifying period had been 10 years rather than five. 47% said this, compared with 32% who said they would still have come and 21% who were unsure.

There was stark variation by visa type, as shown in Table 11. Those on Asylum and Humanitarian routes and Family visa routes were far more likely than average to report that they still would have come to the UK if the standard qualifying period had been 10 years when they applied. Conversely, those holding BN(O), Skilled Worker and Skilled Worker (Health and Care) visas were much more likely than average to say they would not have come to the UK. This pattern suggests that individuals whose routes are more closely tied to economic migration may be more responsive to changes in settlement timelines, whereas those on protection or family routes may be less influenced by these considerations.

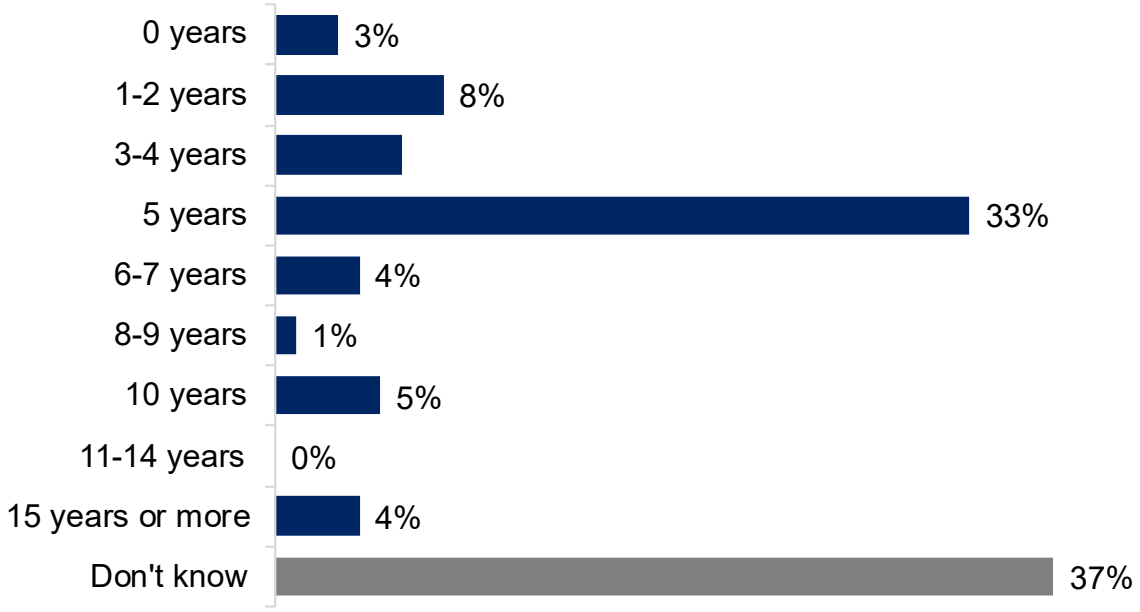
Table 11: Whether Visa Holders and individuals with protection status would have come to the UK if the baseline qualifying period was 10 years at the time of application

Visa type	Would have come to the UK	Would not have come to the UK	Don't know
Overall	**37%**	**38%**	**24%**
Asylum or Humanitarian route	60% (+)	15% (-)	25%
BN(O)	9% (-)	67% (+)	24%
Skilled Worker	19% (-)	61% (+)	20% (-)
Skilled Worker (Health and Care)	20% (-)	62% (+)	19% (-)
Family (Partner and Private Life)	54% (+)	17% (-)	29% (+)
Global Talent	30% (-)	46% (+)	24%
Other	49% (+)	23% (-)	28%

Base: B12, Asylum or Humanitarian route (498), BN(O) (378), Skilled Worker (398), Skilled Worker (Health and Care) (720), Family (602), Global Talent (340), Other (531). (+)/(-) Indicates significantly higher or lower than overall.

Findings on intended length of stay without settled status reinforce this pattern. Most commonly, Visa Holders and individuals with protection status would be willing to wait 5 years in the UK without some form of permanent or settled status (33%) (Figure 10).

Figure 10: Maximum length of stay in UK without permanent or settled status



Base: Routes to Settlement: B11, All Visa Holders or those on a protection route (3,481).

It was uncommon for Visa Holders and those on a protection route to say they would be willing to remain in the UK for more than 5 years if they did not have some form of permanent or settled status. Just 14% of those on routes to settlement indicated they would stay in the UK under such circumstances. 49% said they would stay for 5 years or less. A substantial proportion (37%) said they did not know how long they would stay for if they did not have some form of permanent or settled status.

Impacts relating to visa or protection route movement

When asked about their circumstances on first arrival in the UK, relatively few Visa Holders and individuals with protection status reported that they had been eligible for an alternative visa or protection route at that time. Table 12 shows the proportions of Visa Holders and individuals with protection status who were eligible for various additional routes at the time they came to the UK.[3] Overall, 23% of those on routes to settlement were eligible for any of the other listed routes when they came to the UK.

[3] Respondents were able to select more than one option at this question.

Table 12: Visa or protection routes respondents were also eligible for at the time they came to the UK

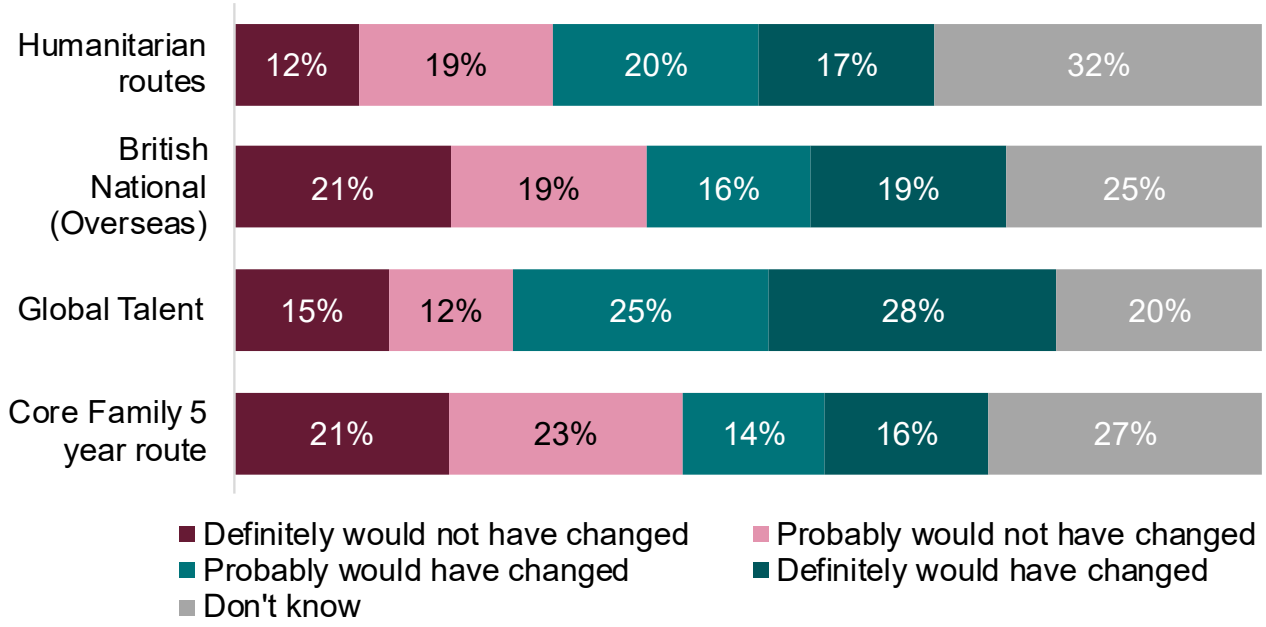
Other eligible route	%
Core Family 5-year route	13%
Global Talent	4%
BN(O)	3%
High Potential Individual	2%
Humanitarian routes	2%
Innovator Founder	1%
NET: Eligible for other listed route	23%

Base: Routes to Settlement: C4a, All current Visa Holders or those on a protection route (3,481). Respondents could select more than one option.

Respondents on a route to settlement who were eligible for alternative routes at the time of application were asked if, under the proposed 10- or 15-year qualifying periods, they would have opted for a different route. Responses depended on which visa types respondents were eligible for at the time of entry into the UK (Figure 11)[4]. Those who were eligible for Global Talent visas were particularly likely to say they would have chosen to come to the UK on this route if the proposed 10-year, or 15-year, qualifying periods for settlement in the UK were shortened for this route.

[4] Those eligible for High Potential Individual visas when they came to the UK were not asked this question as this route is not eligible for settlement.

Figure 11: Likelihood of coming to the UK on a different route if the proposed 10-year, or 15-year, qualifying periods for settlement in the UK were shortened to different lengths (Routes to Settlement)



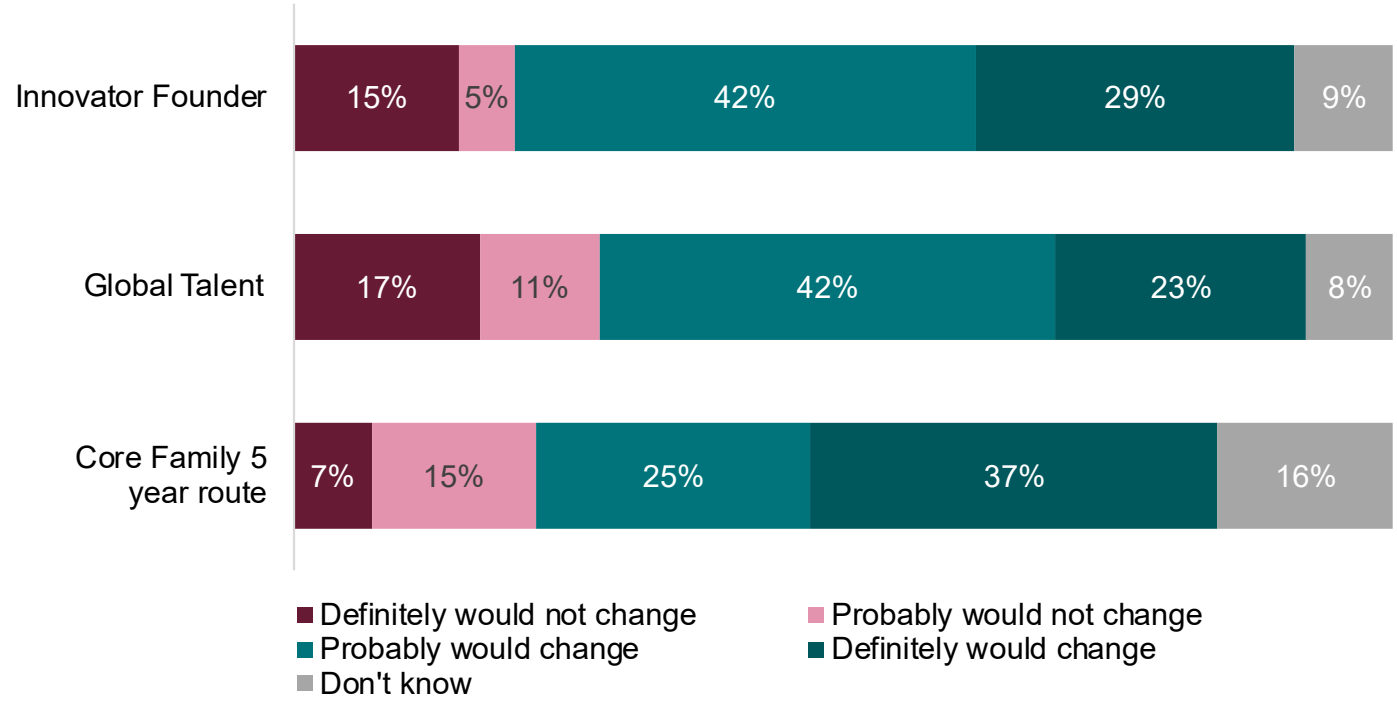
Base. Routes to Settlement: C4b_summary, All current UK Visa Holders or those currently on a protection route who were eligible for other visa routes when they came to the UK: Core Family 5-year route (263); Global Talent (220); BN(O) (180); Humanitarian routes (85). Innovator Founder not charted due to low base size (44).

It was uncommon for Visa Holders and individuals with protection status to report eligibility for other visa routes. As well as their current visa pathway, 7% of those on routes to settlement reported that they were also eligible for at least one of the following routes carrying a reduced qualifying period: Core Family 5-year route (3%), Global Talent (3%), BN(O) (<1%), Humanitarian routes (1%), Innovator Founder (1%).

For all routes mentioned, most of those eligible and on routes to settlement said that they would try to change route if it meant their qualifying period was reduced. As shown in Figure 12, 71% of those eligible for an Innovator Founder visa would try to switch if the route was rewarded with a lower qualifying period, as would 62% of those eligible for the Core Family 5-year route and 65% of those eligible for a Global Talent visa.

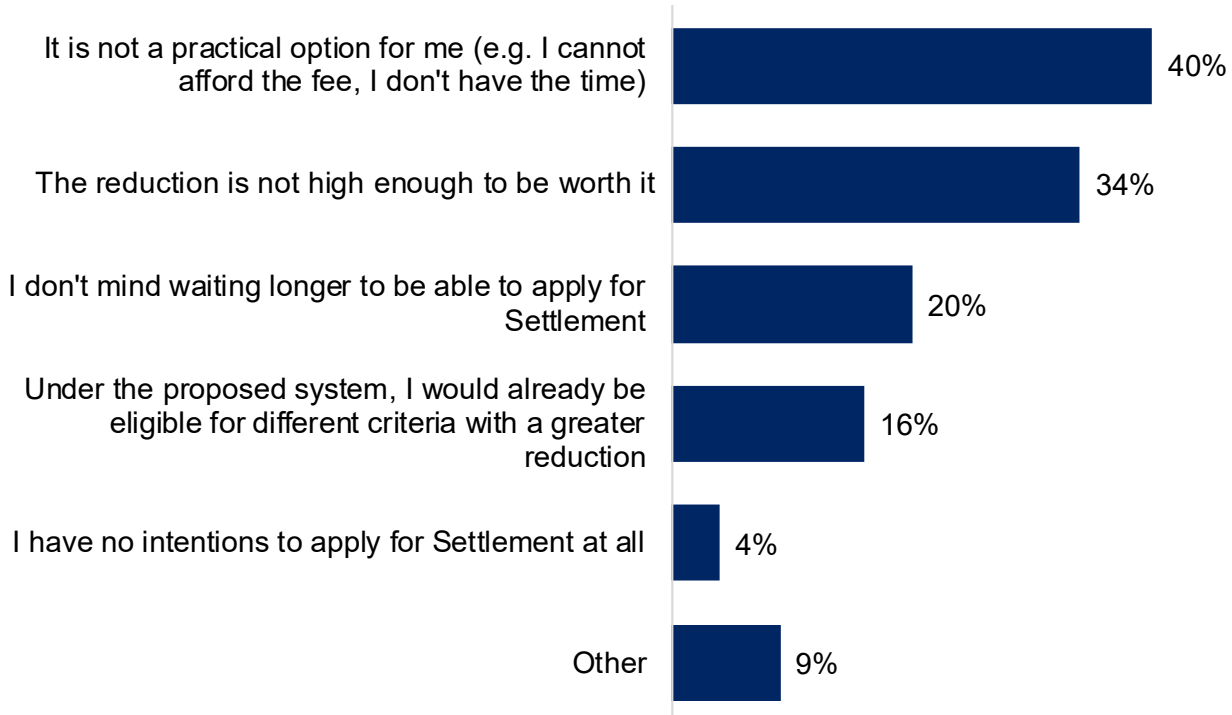
Most often, those who would not switch route said it was because this would not be practical or worth the reduction period (Figure 13).

Figure 12: Likelihood of changing to eligible routes with a reduced qualifying period (Routes to Settlement)



Base: Routes to Settlement: C3a_summary, All current UK Visa Holders or those currently on a protection route who are eligible for other visa routes: Core Family 5-year route (177); Global Talent (99); Innovator Founder (50).

Figure 13: Reasons those eligible for other visa routes would not switch



Base: Routes to Settlement: C3b, All current UK Visa Holders or those currently on a protection route who are eligible to but would not switch to a different route (161). Respondents could select more than one option.

A total of 40% of those who would not switch to a different route with a reduced qualifying period, despite being eligible, said this was because it was not practical to do so, specifically in terms of the fees this would incur or the time this would take.

These findings indicate that extending the baseline qualifying period could have a material impact on both initial migration decisions and longer-term settlement behaviour. The effect appears strongest among those on work-related routes, while those on family or protection routes appear less sensitive to such changes.

Policy-specific impacts

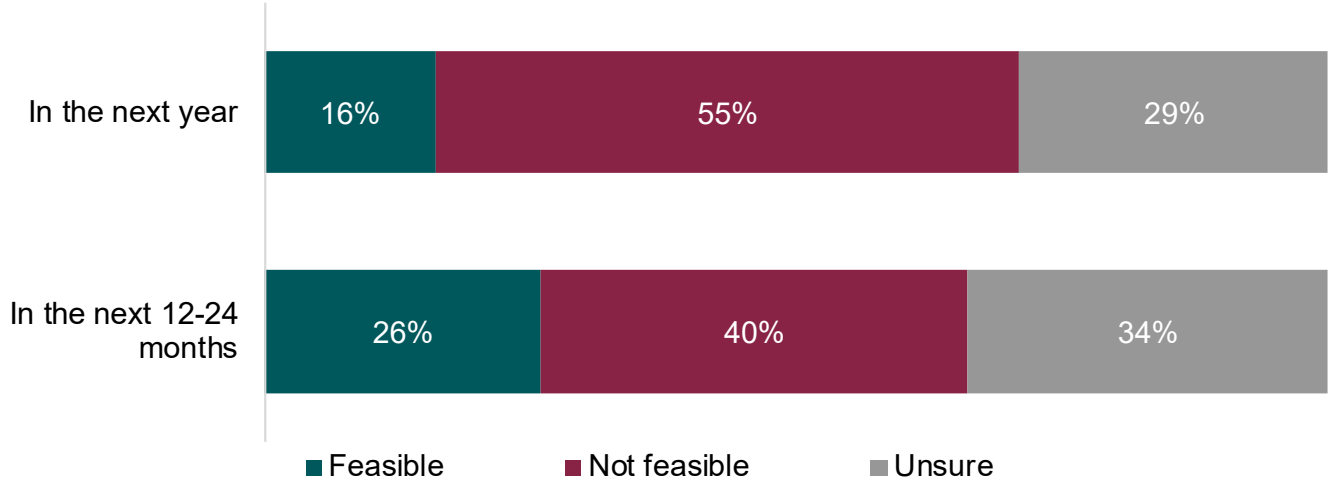
This section examines how specific features of the proposed settlement framework may influence behaviour among those on routes to settlement, including responses to incentives related to employment, earnings, skills, and other eligibility criteria.

Labour market activity

Overall, the findings suggest that financial and occupational incentives within the proposed framework may have a limited impact on behaviour for many individuals, particularly where changes would require significant shifts in employment.

Most of those on routes to settlement who were paying basic rate tax said that switching to a job with a salary of more than £50,270 was not feasible, especially in the short term (Figure 14).

Figure 14: Feasibility of switching to job earning £50,270+ per annum



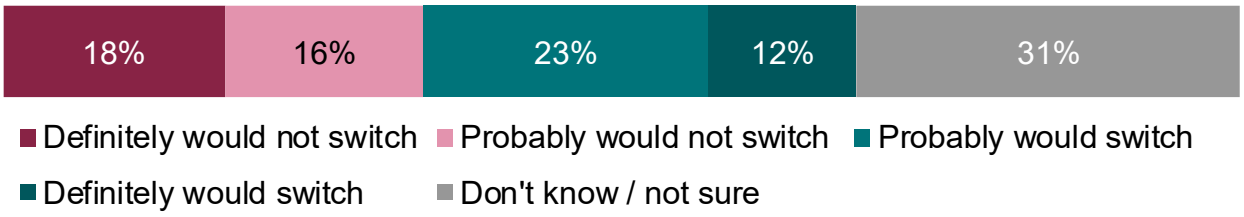
Base: Routes to settlement: C4c: All current UK Visa Holders or those on a protection route who are paying basic rate tax (1,512).

Around 55% said such a move would not be possible within the next year, and a further 29% were unsure. While expectations were somewhat more optimistic over a longer timeframe, a substantial proportion continued to report constraints: 40% said switching would not be feasible within 12 to 24 months, while uncertainty remained high at 34%. This indicates that many individuals perceived structural or personal barriers to increasing their earnings in the near future.

There was variation across visa types. Those holding BN(O) visas and paying basic rate tax were especially likely to say it would not be feasible for them to switch job, regardless of time period. A total of 76% said this would not be feasible for them in the next year, and 72% said this would not be feasible over the next 12-24 months. Global Talent Visa Holders paying basic rate tax were more likely than average to report anticipating that it would be feasible to switch to a higher-earning job over the next year (23%), or the next 12-24 months (40%), reflecting differences in occupational profiles and labour market positioning across routes. Care workers and senior care workers were more likely than average to be uncertain about the feasibility of switching jobs in the next year (46%) and 12 to 24 months (43%).

The anticipated impact of reducing the qualifying period for those paying higher rate income tax to 5 years was mixed, with considerable levels of uncertainty (Figure 15).

Figure 15: Likelihood of switching to a job earning above £50,270+ per annum if it meant a reduced qualifying period



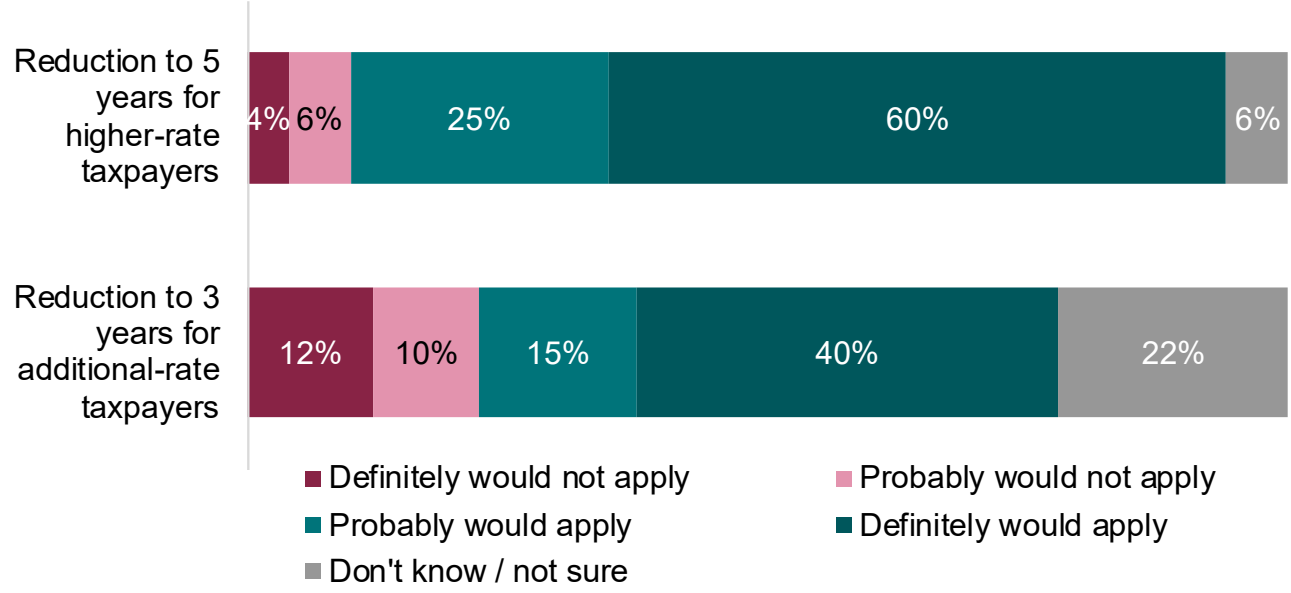
Base: Routes to settlement: C5a: All current UK Visa Holders or those on a protection route who are paying basic rate tax (1,512).

35% of those on routes to settlement paying basic rate tax said they would probably or definitely switch to a job paying above the higher rate tax threshold within the next year, if it meant their qualifying period would be reduced. As shown above (Figure 15), the feasibility of doing so varied significantly and many would be unlikely to be able to make such a switch in practice. A slightly lower proportion (34%) said they probably or definitely would not, while a further 31% were unsure. Again a greater degree of uncertainty was seen amongst care workers and senior care workers with 40% unsure if they could.

Those paying higher and additional rates of tax were asked how likely they would be to apply for settlement if they were eligible for reductions on the basis of tax rate. Among both those paying the higher rate and those paying the additional rate, most would apply for settlement if eligible for a reduction. Taken together with the results discussed above, this suggests that the proposed system of reductions in baseline qualifying period may be more impactful for those who are already eligible, than for those who would need to change jobs to become eligible.

A majority (85%) of those on routes to settlement paying higher-rate income tax would apply if the qualifying period was reduced to 5 years for those who pay higher-rate tax. A substantially smaller proportion (9%) would not apply, with a further 6% unsure (Figure 16).

Figure 16: Likelihood of applying for settlement if reductions applied to those paying higher / additional tax



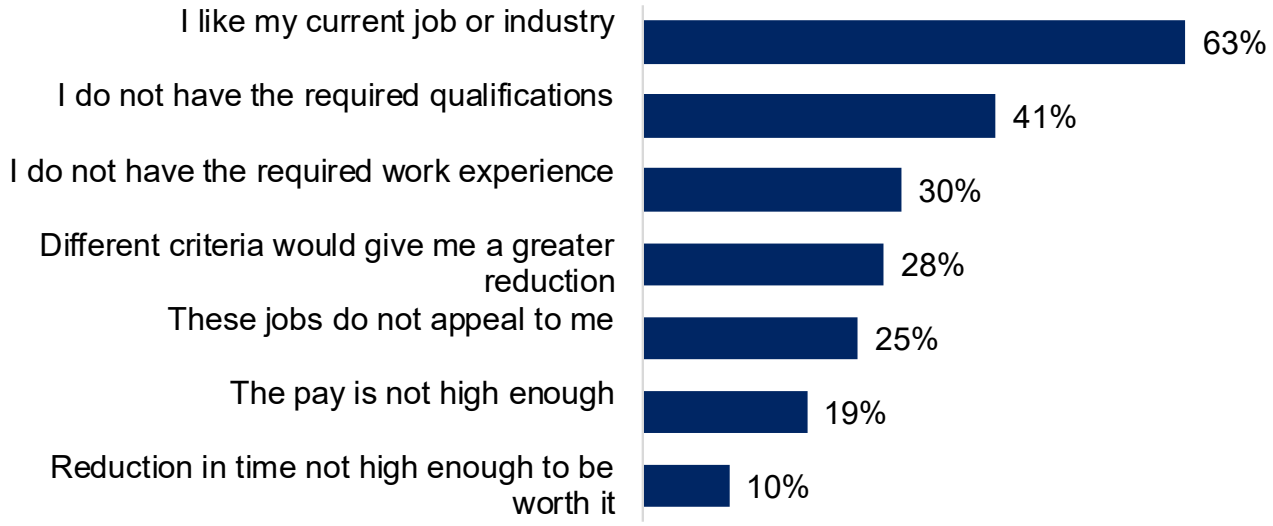
Base: Routes to settlement: C5:All current UK Visa Holders or those on a protection route who are paying higher rate tax (390). C6:All current UK Visa Holders or those on a protection route who are paying additional rate tax (460). Data labels below 5% not displayed.

Just over half (56%) of those on routes to settlement paying additional-rate income tax said they would apply for settlement under a framework where they were eligible for a 3-year baseline qualifying period. A smaller proportion at 22% would not apply for settlement in these circumstances, and the same proportion were not sure.

There was some variation in response based on visa type. Skilled Worker Visa Holders paying higher-rate income tax were more likely than average to say they probably or definitely would apply if eligible for a 5-year baseline qualifying period (89% vs. 85% overall). Those on Global Talent visas were less likely than average to say they probably or definitely would apply, although this was still reported by a majority (73%).

Most commonly, those on routes to settlement not currently working in the public sector indicated they would be unlikely to apply to a public service occupation in the next year, even if it meant their qualifying period was reduced. A higher proportion (43%) reported that they 'probably' or 'definitely would not', compared with 32% who said they would apply for such jobs to reduce their qualifying period. Those who said they probably or definitely would not apply to a public service occupation most frequently said this was because they liked their current job or industry (63%) (Figure 17). Lacking the required qualifications (41%) and work experience (30%) were also commonly reported reasons.

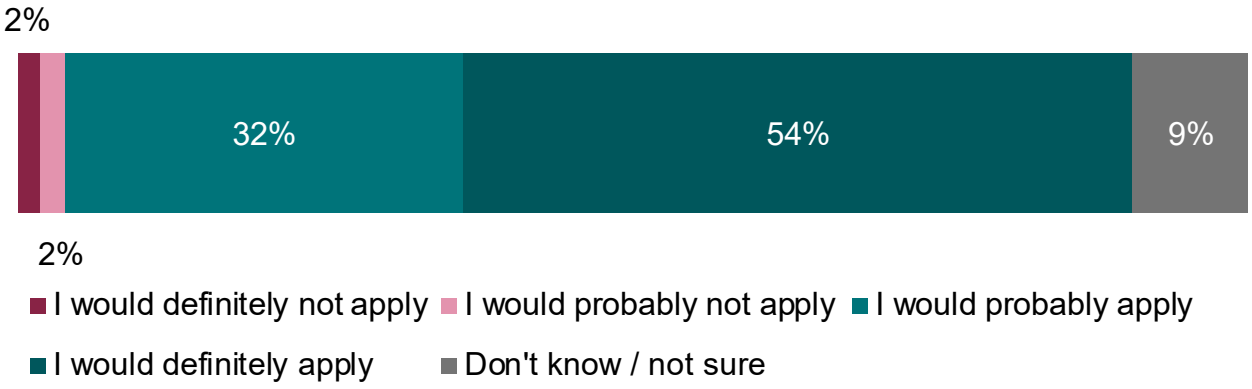
Figure 17: Reasons for not applying for a public service occupation



Base: Routes to settlement: C8b: All current UK Visa Holders or those currently on a protection route not working in the public sector or who would not/would probably not apply for a public sector job (898). Respondents could select more than one option. Results below 10% not shown on chart.

However, for those already working in, or open to, public sector roles, the incentive appeared more effective. A majority (87%) of this group said they would apply for settlement if public sector workers were eligible for a reduced qualifying period (Figure 18).

Figure 18: Likelihood of applying for settlement if reductions applied to public sector workers



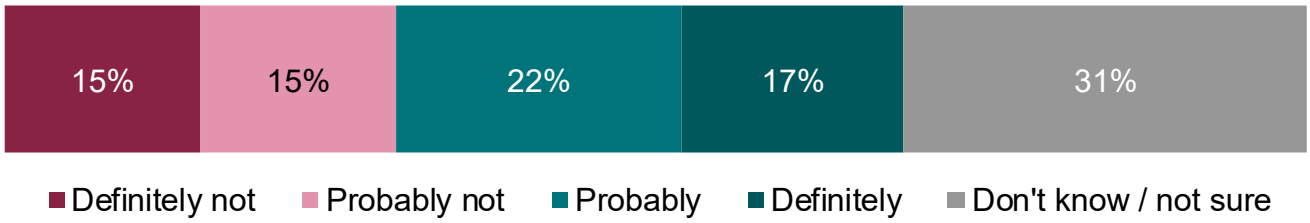
Base: Routes to settlement: C9: All current UK Visa Holders or those currently on a protection route working in the public sector or who would/would probably apply for a public sector job (1,643).

Findings relating to occupational progression show a similar dynamic. Over half (55%) of those in non-degree level roles had not applied for degree-level jobs in the past year, indicating limited upward mobility in practice. Individuals with protection status (30%) were less likely to have applied for degree level jobs than Visa Holders (57%).

When presented with a potential incentive, 39% of those in jobs not requiring an RQF level 6 qualification said they would consider applying for a degree-level job if it prevented an extension

to their qualifying period (Figure 19). However, a comparable proportion either said they would not apply for a degree-level job (30%) or were unsure (31%).

Figure 19: Likelihood of changing to a degree level job if it led to a reduction in time to settlement



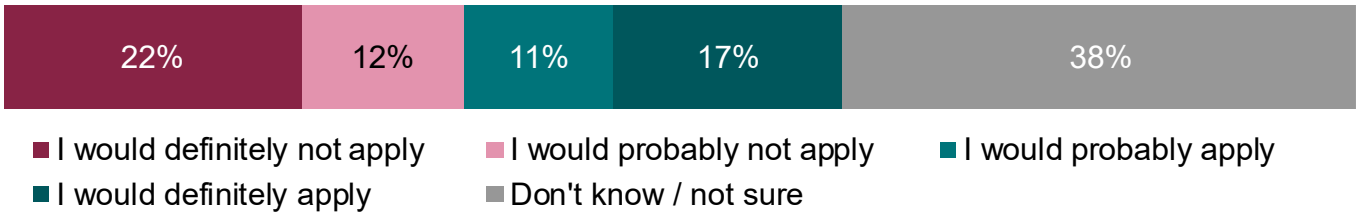
Base: Routes to settlement: C25: All current UK Visa Holders or those currently on a protection route whose current job requires a minimum qualification below level 6 (1,188).

People with no formal qualifications (16%) were less likely to say they would apply for at least one degree-level job within a year if it prevented an extension, compared with those who have a Level 6 qualification or higher (45%).

Where respondents said they would not pursue higher-skilled roles, this was most commonly due to structural or personal constraints, including a lack of qualifications (43%) or relevant experience (22%), as well as high job satisfaction with existing employment (40%). This indicates that wider barriers to occupational mobility may limit the effectiveness of qualification-based incentives.

The impact of increasing the qualifying period to 15 years for those working in jobs below degree level on settlement applications was mixed (Figure 20). Around 35% said they would not apply for settlement under these conditions, while 27% said they would still apply and 38% were unsure. Individuals with protection status were somewhat more likely than Visa Holders to maintain an intention to apply, suggesting differing levels of sensitivity to policy changes across groups.

Figure 20: Likelihood of applying for settlement if the qualifying period were increased to 15 years for those working in jobs below degree-level

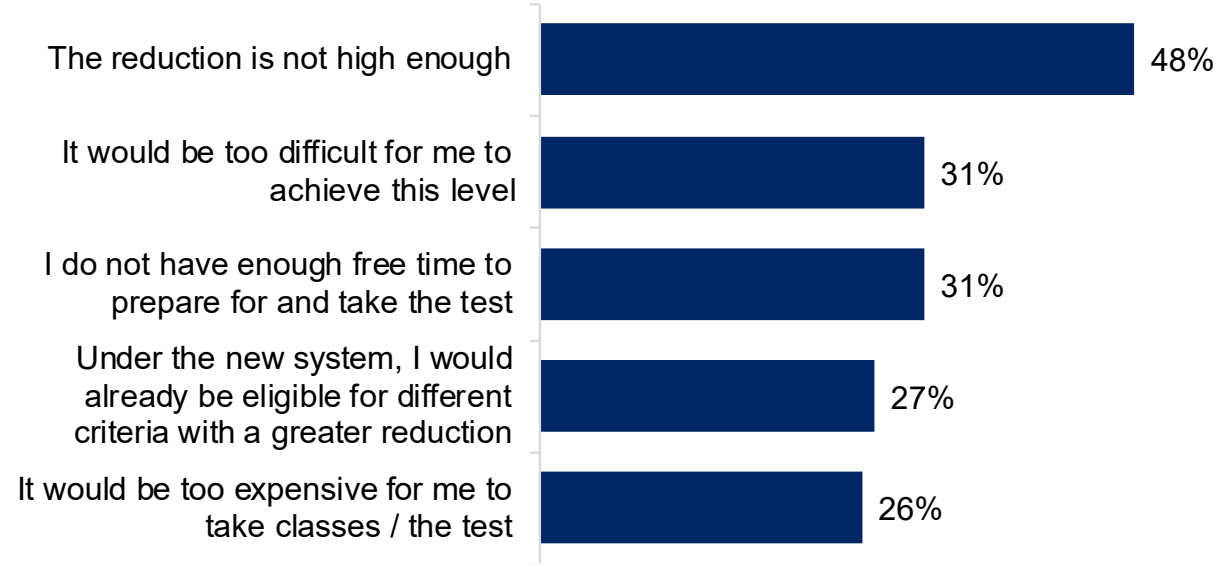


Base: Routes to settlement: C27: All current UK Visa Holders or those currently on a protection route (3,481).

English language proficiency

Incentives linked to English language proficiency showed moderate levels of engagement. Around 51% of those without an advanced English qualification (CEFR level C1+) would seek to complete one if it reduced the qualifying period from 10 years to 9. However, 26% would not. Of these, 43% said that personal or financial barriers would prevent them from getting an advanced English language qualification (Figure 21).

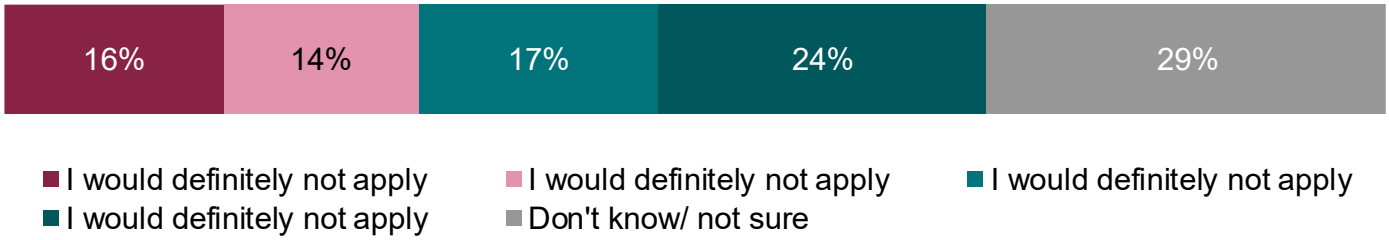
Figure 21: Reasons for not seeking out an advanced English language qualification



Base: Routes to settlement: C11: All current UK Visa Holders or those currently on a protection route who would not/would probably not seek out an advanced English language qualification (352). Respondents could select more than one option. Results below 10% not shown on chart.

Many of those on routes to settlement (41%) would apply for settlement if the qualifying period were reduced to 9 years rather than 10 for those who have an advanced English Language qualification, as shown in Figure 22.

Figure 22: Likelihood of applying for settlement if there was a reduction for having an advanced English language qualification



Base: Routes to settlement: C12: All current UK Visa Holders or those currently on a protection route (3,481).

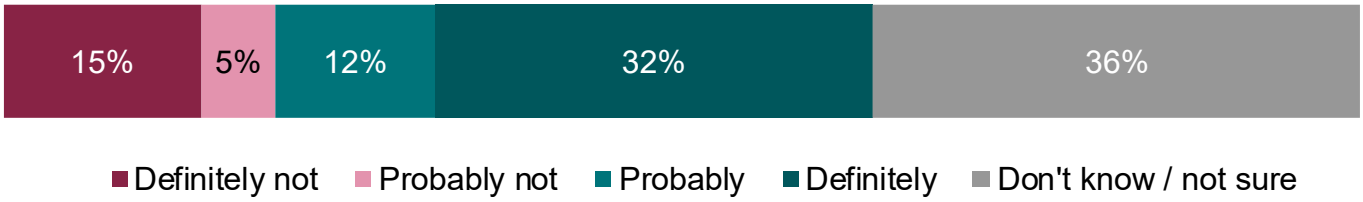
Welfare claims and government debt

Eligibility for public funds was limited among those on routes to settlement. Most respondents (88%) reported that they were not eligible to claim public funds, with only 12% indicating that they were eligible. Individuals with protection status were substantially more likely to be eligible than Visa Holders (68% compared with 8%), reflecting differences in entitlements across routes.

Among those who were eligible to claim public funds, take-up was relatively high. Around 70% of those who were eligible, or who had dependants who were eligible, reported that they had claimed public funds. This represents 8% of all those on routes to settlement.

When asked how an extension to the qualifying period might influence behaviour, responses were mixed. The most common response was that individuals would not claim public funds if doing so extended the qualifying period to 15 years (44%) (Figure 23).

Figure 23: Likelihood of not claiming public funds if it led to an extension (for those on a route to settlement)



Base: Routes to settlement:C15: All current UK Visa Holders or those currently on a protection route who are/whose dependants are eligible to claim public funds but have not (128).

However, some said they would continue to claim (20%), whilst a notable proportion remained unsure (36%). Visa Holders were more likely than individuals with protection status to say they would not claim under these circumstances (48% compared with 33%), suggesting some variation in how different groups may respond to this condition.

Levels of government debt were low across the sample. Most respondents (93%) reported that they did not have any government debt, while a very small proportion (2%) said that they did. A further 5% did not know or preferred not to say. Individuals with protection status were slightly more likely than Visa Holders to report holding government debt (5% compared with 2%).

Transitional arrangements

Transitional arrangements for those already on 5-year pathways to settlement were strongly supported. Overall, 82% of Visa Holders and individuals with protection status agreed with the principle of transitional arrangements for those already on a pathway to settlement. 8% disagreed, while 10% were unsure (Figure 24). This indicates strong backing for maintaining continuity and certainty for those already progressing through the current system.

Figure 24: Agreement with principle of transitional arrangements



Base: Routes to Settlement: B10b, All current UK Visa Holders or those on a protection route (3,481). Student or Graduate Routes: B10b, All current UK Visa Holders or those on a protection route (556).

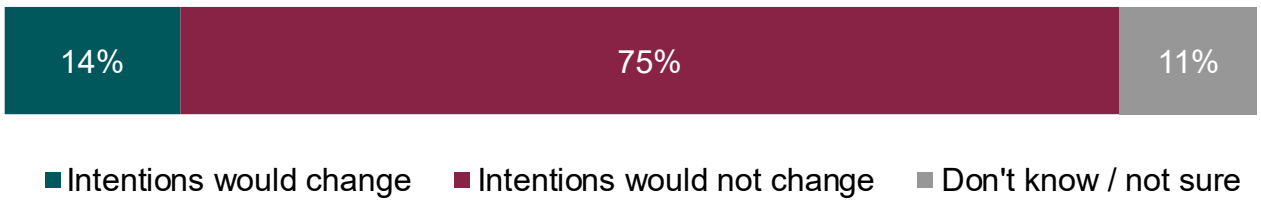
While a majority of all groups supported transitional arrangements, there was some variation by visa type. Visa Holders were more likely than individuals with protection status to agree with the principle of transitional arrangements (83% compared to 75%). Skilled Worker (92%) and Skilled Worker (Health and Care) (92%) Visa Holders were also more likely than average to support transitional arrangements. Conversely, those on Family visas were slightly more likely than average to disagree with the principle (12% compared to 8% overall).

Care workers and senior care workers also showed higher-than-average support for the principle of transitional arrangements for those already on a 5-year pathway (89% compared to 82% overall).

Support was also shaped by migration motivations. Those who reported that their decision to come to the UK was influenced by the opportunity to settle were more likely to support transitional arrangements, with 89% agreeing and 6% disagreeing. Among those not influenced by settlement, agreement was lower at 78%, and disagreement higher at 12%.

When asked how transitional arrangements might affect their own behaviour, most respondents reported that their settlement intentions would remain unchanged if an Earned Settlement framework were introduced but did not apply to those already on a 5-year pathway. 75% said their intentions would not change, compared with 14% who said they would, and 11% who were unsure (Figure 25).

Figure 25: Impact of transitional arrangements on settlement intentions



Base: Routes to Settlement: B10a, All current UK Visa Holders or those on a protection route who have not already applied for settlement (3,365).

Reported impacts here remained relatively stable across visa types, with a couple of exceptions. Those holding British National (Overseas) visas were more likely than average to say that their intentions would not change if transitional arrangements meant that changes did not apply to those already on a 5-year path to settlement (85% vs. 75% overall).

Those holding Skilled Worker (Health and Care) visas were slightly more likely than average to say their intentions would change (17% vs. 14%). Skilled Worker (Health and Care) Visa Holders who originally reported that they were not intending to apply or were unsure about applying for settlement at the time of surveying were more likely than average to report that they would apply if transitional arrangements were in place (13% vs. 7% overall).

Dependant eligibility for settlement under new rules

Perceptions of dependant eligibility under the proposed rules were more mixed, with no clear majority view. Although not an overall majority, it was most common for those with dependant partners to report that those partners would be eligible for settlement in their own right under the new proposed rules. This applied to 47%, while 20% said their partners would not be eligible in their own right, and 32% were unsure. It was more common for individuals with protection status to report having an eligible partner, compared with Visa Holders (65% vs. 46%).

Most (93%) of those on routes to settlement with eligible partners had partners who would be eligible for settlement themselves in 5 years or less under the current rules. Nearly all of them (99%) had partners who would be eligible in 10 years or less.

Under the new rules, 89% of those with partners as dependents reported that their partners would be eligible for settlement in 10 years or less. A smaller, but still notable proportion (47%) had partners who would be eligible in 5 years or less. Individuals with protection status (75%) were more likely to have partners who would be eligible in 5 years or less than Visa Holders (46%).

Chapter Summary

Most individuals on routes to settlement who had not yet applied indicated a clear intention to do so under the current rules, with some variation across visa status and type.

Awareness of the proposed changes was relatively high, although it varied by visa type, proximity to settlement, and the importance individuals placed on settlement in their migration decisions.

Under a proposed Earned Settlement framework, intentions to apply became notably more uncertain. While around half said they would still apply, a substantial proportion were unsure or indicated they would not proceed. Increased time to settlement was the most commonly selected reason for change in intentions to settle.

Extending the baseline qualifying period also produced mixed responses, with evidence that longer pathways may mean fewer Visa Holders intend to settle. This was particularly the case among those on work-related routes. Willingness to remain in the UK without settled status was limited.

Policy incentives linked to earnings, occupation, qualifications, and English language proficiency showed uneven effects. There was strong support for transitional arrangements.

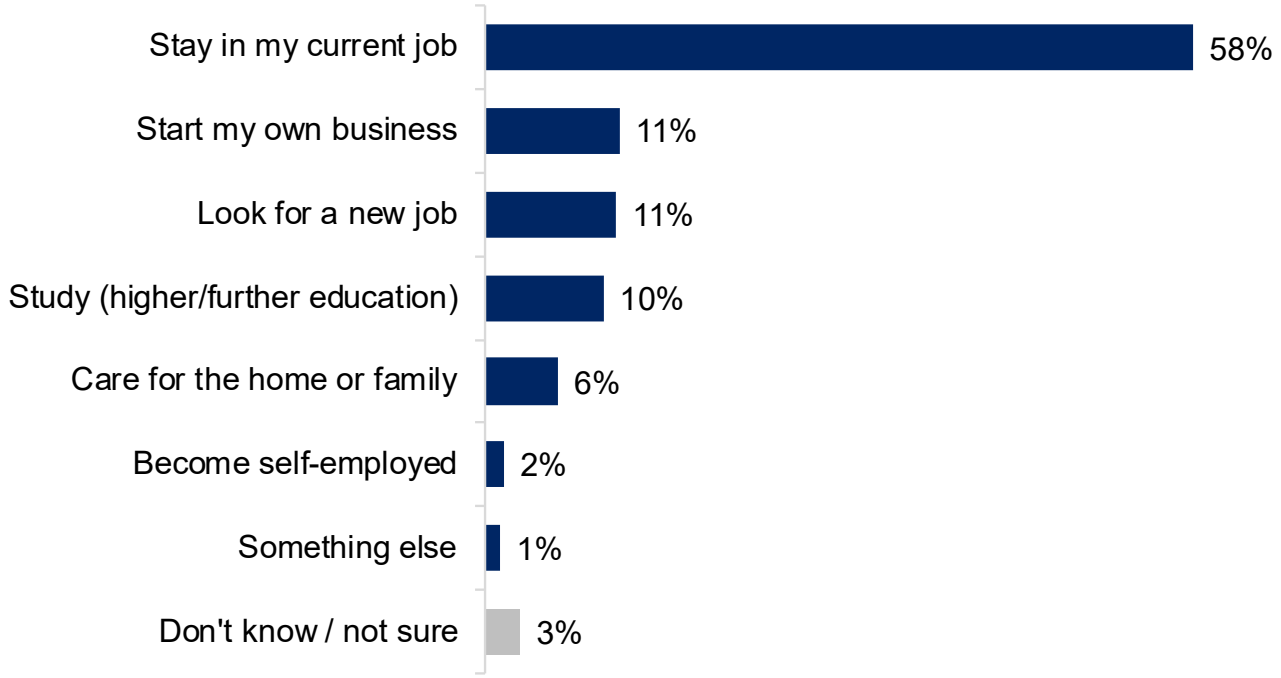
Chapter 4: Future plans

This chapter explores individuals' anticipated plans following the grant of settled status, including employment intentions and intention to apply for British citizenship. It provides insight into how settlement may shape longer-term economic participation and integration, and how plans vary by route and circumstances.

Plans following the grant of settled status

Among current UK Visa Holders and those on a protection route who intended to settle, most (58%) said they would remain in their current role after being granted settled status (Figure 26). Others envisaged some form of transition, with similar proportions of respondents reporting that they would change jobs (11%), move into business ownership (11%), or undertake further or higher education (10%). Plans to step away from paid work other than for study were relatively uncommon. Only a small proportion anticipated focusing on caring responsibilities (6%). A further 2% planned to move into self-employment.

Figure 26: Plans following the grant of settled status



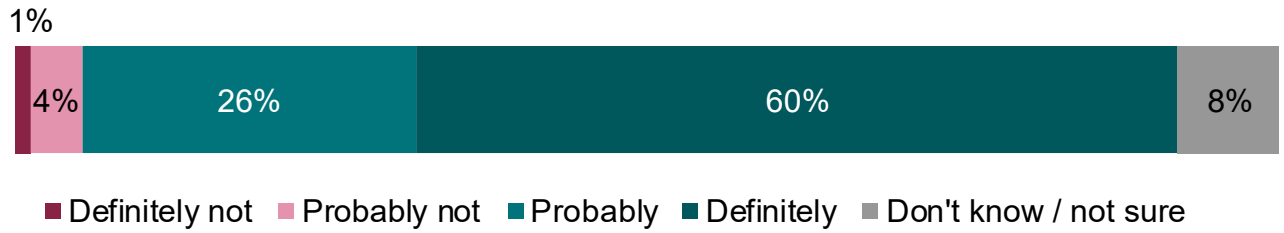
Base: Routes to settlement: B13A, All current UK Visa Holders or those currently on a protection route who intend to settle (2,948).

A lower proportion of care workers and senior care workers anticipated staying in the current role (49%) and a greater proportion anticipated studying at higher or further education level (28%).

Intention to apply for British citizenship

For those on routes to settlement, there was a high level of certainty about their intention to apply for British citizenship if they were granted settlement. As shown in Figure 27, a total of 60% indicated that they would definitely look to apply for British citizenship if they were granted settlement, with a further 26% saying they probably would. In contrast, only a very small proportion (5%) reported that they would probably or definitely not do so; 8% were uncertain.

Figure 27: Intention to apply for British citizenship following the grant of settled status



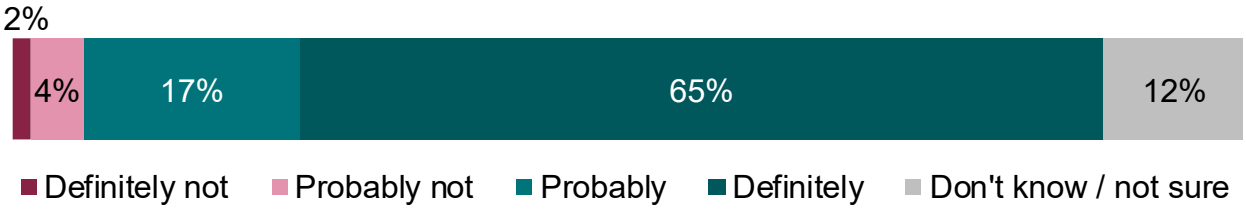
Base: Routes to settlement: C29, All current UK Visa Holders or those currently on a protection route who have not already applied for settlement but who had considered it at some point as an option for remaining in the UK (3,070).

Almost all (97%) BN(O) Visa Holders reported probably or definitely intending to apply for citizenship after being granted settled status, higher than the average across all visa and protection routes.

Amongst those on routes to settlement who had ILR or who had already applied for settlement, responses indicated a strong inclination towards applying for British citizenship. A total of 65% would definitely look to apply for British citizenship, and around one in six (17%) would probably do so (Figure 28). Certainty was particularly high amongst those who were parents of a British citizen, with 72% indicating they definitely would apply for citizenship.

In contrast, only a very small proportion said they would probably or definitely not apply (6%). A further 12% reported that they were not sure.

Figure 28: Likelihood of applying for British citizenship in the future amongst those with ILR or who have applied



Base: Routes to settlement: D7, Those with indefinite leave to remain or those who have applied for settlement (796).

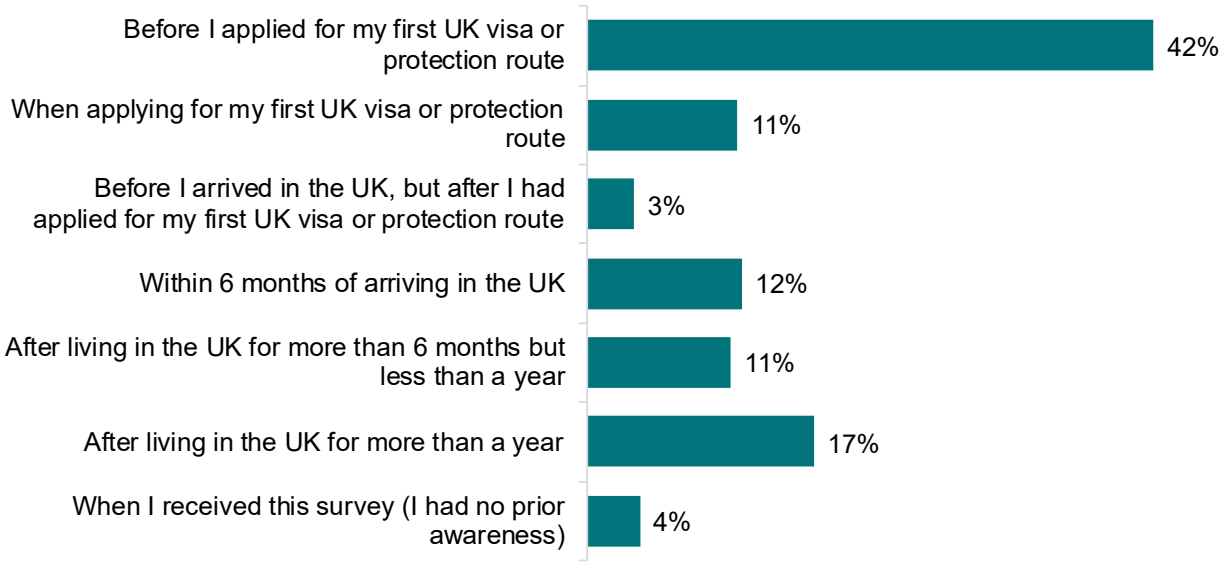
Chapter 5: Student and Graduate routes

This section examines awareness of proposed changes to the settlement framework among Student and Graduate Visa Holders, as well as the anticipated impacts of these changes on their intentions to settle in the UK.

Awareness, consideration and intentions to apply for settlement

Awareness of settlement among those on Student and Graduate routes was lower at earlier stages of the migration journey compared with those on routes to settlement, though overall awareness remained relatively high. A total of 57% reported being aware of settlement prior to arriving in the UK, compared with substantially higher levels (75%) among those on routes to settlement (Figure 29). This reflects lower levels of early engagement, with 42% being aware before applying for their first visa or protection route, compared with 54% among those on routes to settlement.

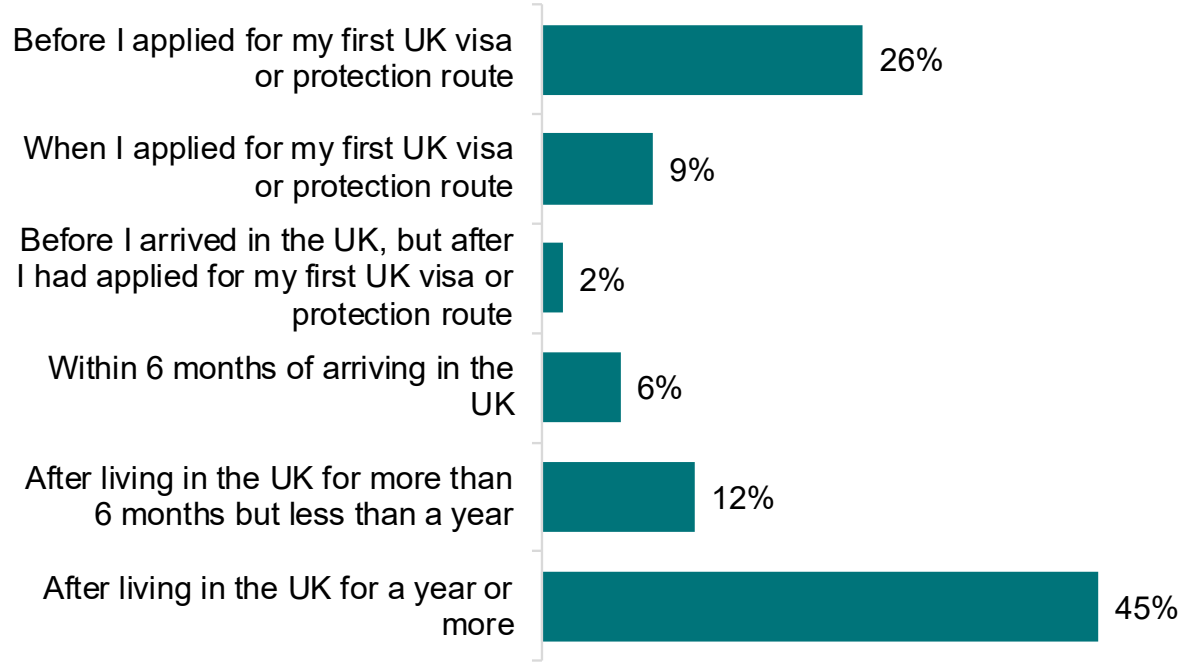
Figure 29: First awareness of settlement



Base: Student or Graduate Routes: B1, All UK Visa Holders or those on a protection route (556).

Among those who were aware of settlement, a similarly high proportion had considered applying (91%), although this is slightly below the level observed among those on routes to settlement (94%). However, the timing of this consideration differs markedly. Student and Graduate route holders were much more likely to first consider settlement after arrival (64%), compared with those on routes to settlement, who were more likely to do so before arrival (36%) (Figure 30). This suggests that amongst those on Student and Graduate routes, settlement is more often considered at a later stage, once individuals are in the UK.

Figure 30: First consideration of applying for settlement



Base: Student or Graduate Routes: B3A, All current UK Visa Holders or those on a protection route who have considered applying for settlement (448).

Despite those on Student and Graduate routes generally considering applying for settlement later, for those who had considered applying before or at the point of applying for their visa, 88% reported that the ability to apply for settlement influenced their decision to come to the UK to some or a great extent (Figure 31). However, when considered across all respondents, the influence of settlement is lower than among those Student and Graduate routes with 26% reporting that settlement influenced their decision to come to the UK to 'some' or a 'great extent', compared with 35% among those on routes to settlement.

Figure 31: Whether ability to apply for settlement influenced initial decision to come to the UK

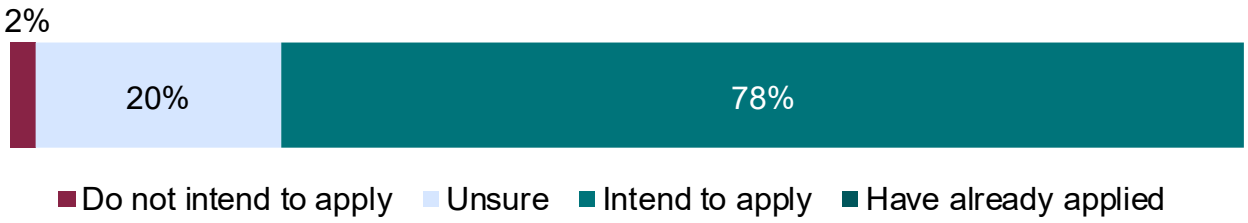


Base: Student and Graduate routes: B3B, All current UK Visa Holders or those currently on a protection route who considered applying for settlement before or when they applied for their visa (183).

Intentions to apply for settlement were also lower and more uncertain among Student and Graduate Visa Holders. Among those who had considered applying, 78% reported that they intended to apply, compared with 92% among those on routes to settlement. Uncertainty is

notably higher, with 20% reporting that they were unsure, compared with 7% among those on routes to settlement (Figure 32).

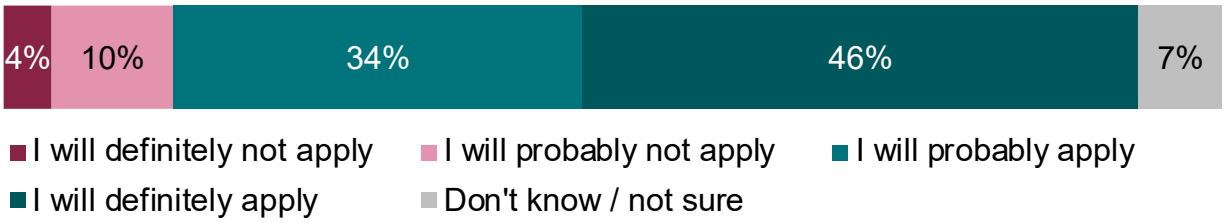
Figure 32: Intention to apply for settlement among those who have considered



Base: Student or Graduate routes: B4, All current UK Visa Holders or those currently on a protection route who have considered applying for settlement (448). Data labels below 5% not displayed.

Among those who had not yet applied but had considered settlement, four in five (80%) reported that they probably or definitely would apply under the current rules (Figure 33). As with those on routes to settlement, these reported intentions were higher than historically observed outcomes, which may reflect response bias or the fact that intentions expressed earlier in the migration journey do not always translate into realised behaviour.

Figure 33: Likelihood of applying for settlement under the current rules



Base: Student or Graduate routes: C1, All current UK Visa Holders or those currently on a protection route who have not already applied for settlement, but who had considered it at some point as an option for remaining in the UK (447).

Alternative options, contingency planning and reasons for these

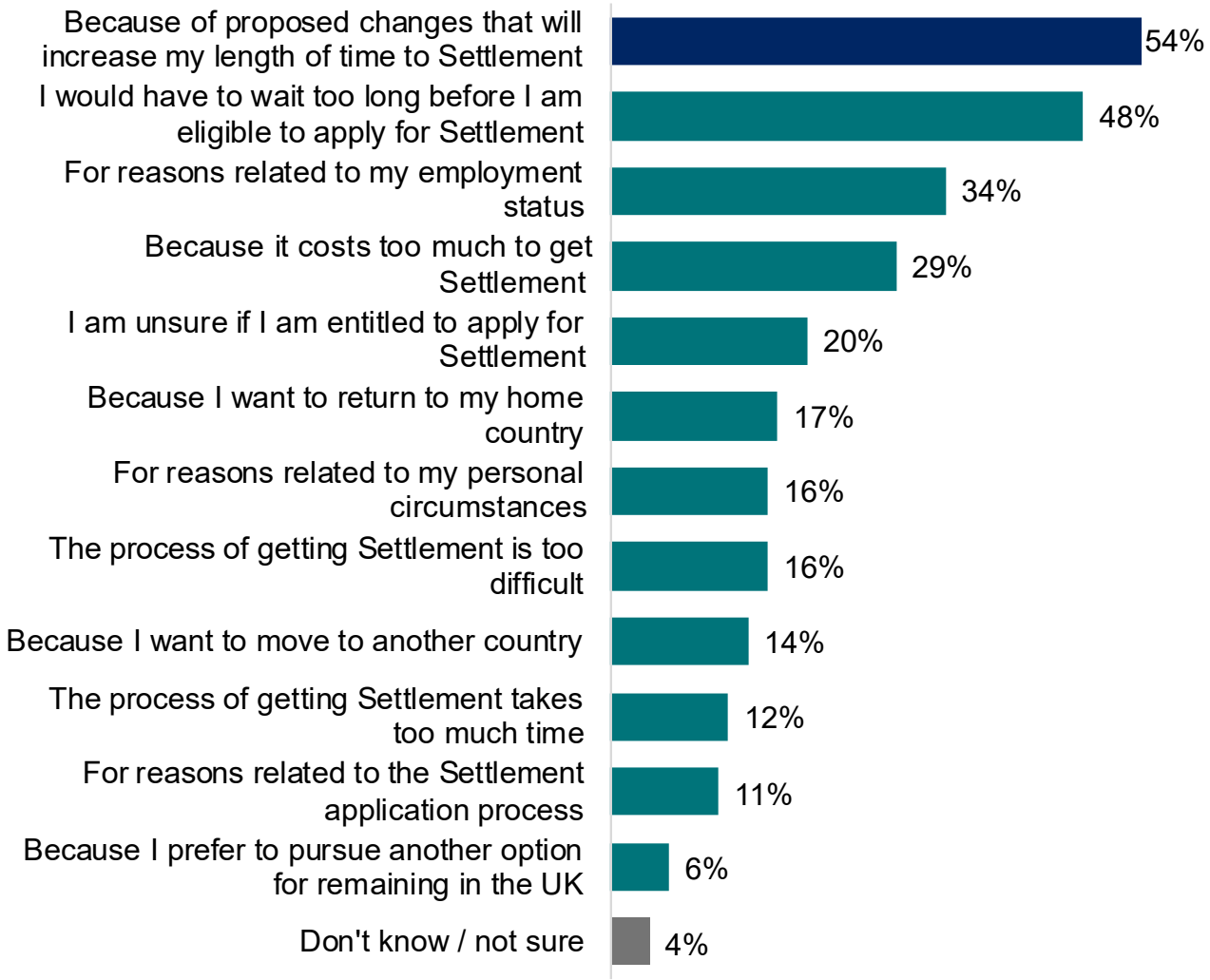
Contingency planning is particularly prominent among Student and Graduate Visa Holders. Among those who were unsure or did not intend to apply for settlement, a large majority were considering alternative options, with 76% reporting that they were considering leaving the UK. This is notably higher than among those on routes to settlement (53%), indicating greater uncertainty about long-term stay.

Even among those intending to apply for settlement, consideration of alternative options is widespread. A high proportion (75%) reported that they were also considering other ways to remain in the UK, such as extending their visa or switching routes. This is substantially higher than those on routes to settlement (56%), indicating that Student and Graduate route holders are more determined to remain in the UK.

The reasons underpinning this uncertainty and contingency planning differ from those observed among individuals on routes to settlement. While time and requirements of the settlement process

remain important (82% compared to 76% for those on routes to settlement), personal and economic considerations were more frequently cited among Student and Graduate route holders, with 44% identifying these as contributing to their uncertainty or decision not to apply (Figure 34), compared to 30% of those on routes to settlement

Figure 34: Reasons for not, or uncertainty about, applying for settlement



Base: Student and Graduate routes: B6, All current UK Visa Holders or those currently on a protection route who are unsure or not intending to apply for settlement (171). Respondents could select more than one option.

This suggests that Student and Graduate route holders engage with the idea of settlement later, express lower levels of certainty about applying, and are more likely to consider alternative options.

Settlement intentions under the current framework

Student and Graduate Visa Holders are not eligible for pathways to settlement. However, most indicated intentions to apply for settlement at some point in future, if the current framework

remained in place. Among this group, 80% said they would definitely or probably apply under the existing framework, including 46% who said they would definitely apply (Figure 33). This is less than those on routes to settlement as 87% said they would definitely or probably apply under the existing framework, while 65% said they definitely would.

Awareness of proposed changes

Those on Student and Graduate visa routes indicated strong awareness of proposed changes to settlement. 87% were aware of the proposed changes, compared to 13% who were not. In comparison, for those on routes to settlement, only 79% were aware of the changes and 21% were unaware.

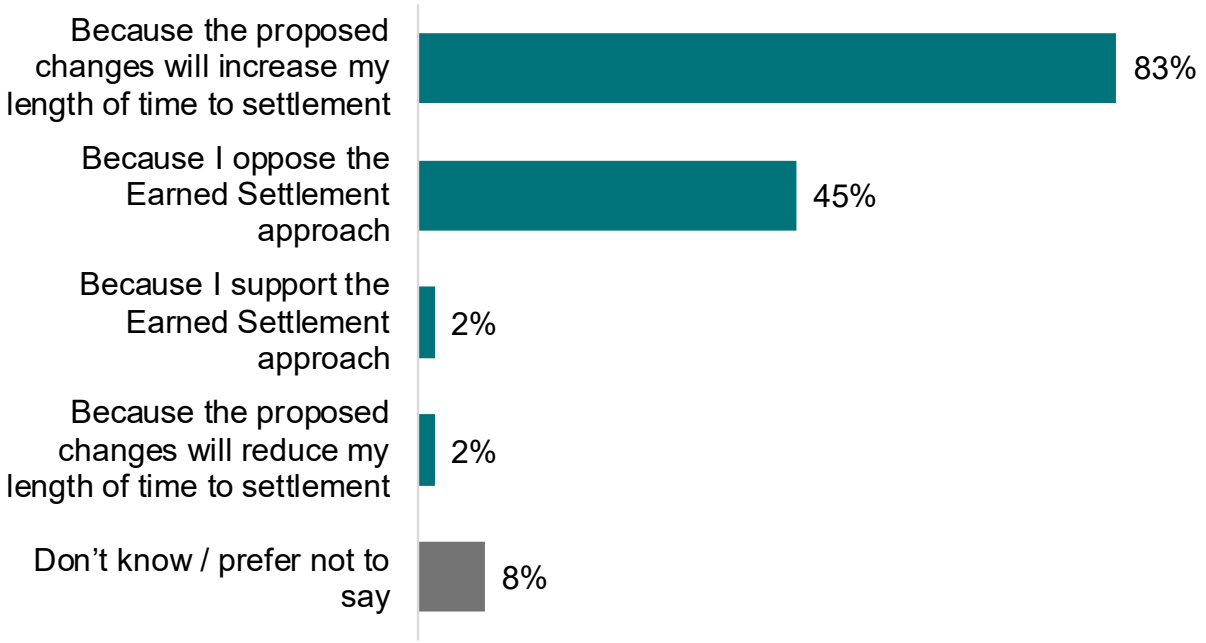
Overall impacts of proposed changes to settlement

Hypothetical impacts of an Earned Settlement system on settlement intentions

The proportion of those on Student or Graduate routes who would apply for settlement under the proposed framework was lower (31%) than among those on a route to settlement (48%). Among those on Student or Graduate routes, 47% were unsure whether they would apply and 22% said they would not.

More than half of Student or Graduate Visa Holders (55%) said they would or might change their mind about applying for settlement in future under an Earned Settlement framework, compared to 49% of those on routes to settlement. Of those who said they would or might change their mind, the increased length of time to settlement was the primary driver (83%) (Figure 35). This was also the primary driver for those on routes to settlement (76%).

Figure 35: Reasons for changes to Settlement intentions under an Earned Settlement framework



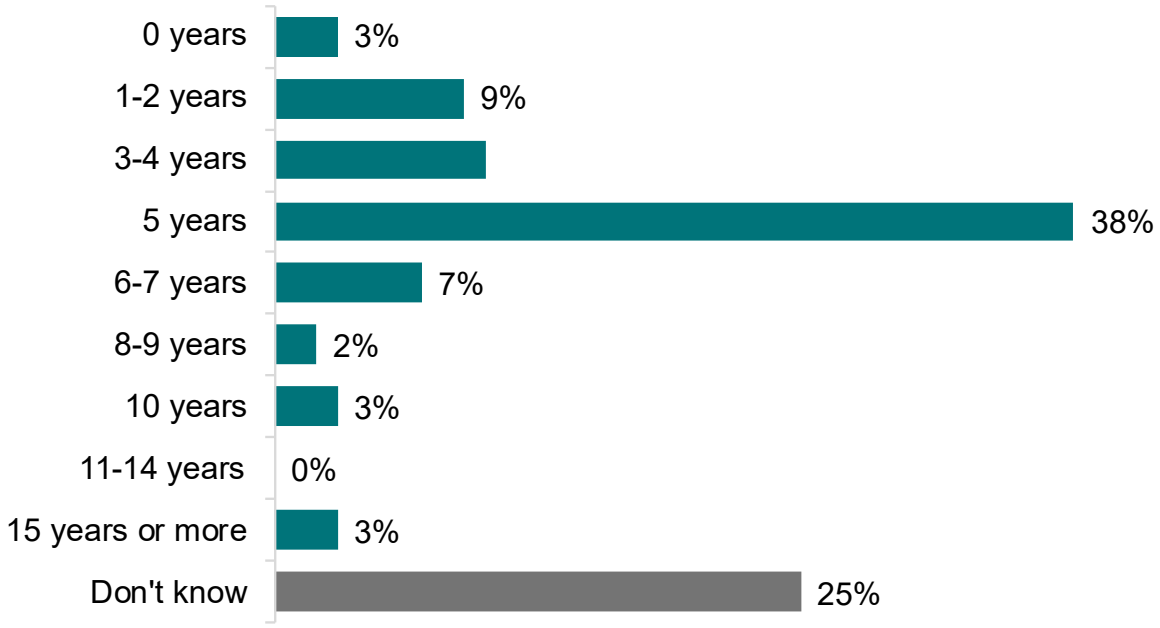
Base: Student or Graduate Routes: B9, All who would/might change settlement intentions (292). Respondents could select more than one option.

Impacts relating to an extended baseline qualifying period

45% of those on Student and Graduate routes said they would not have chosen to come to the UK if the baseline qualifying period was 10 years at the time of their application. 27% said they still would have chosen to come. As with those on routes to settlement, a substantial proportion were unsure (28%).

As with those on routes to settlement, and shown in Figure 36, a minority (16%) of those on Student or Graduate routes reported willingness to remain in the UK for more than 5 years if they did not have some form of permanent or settled status. 59% said they would stay for a maximum of 5 years without permanent or settled status, more than those on routes to settlement (49%).

Figure 36: Maximum length of stay in UK without permanent or settled status



Base: Student or Graduate Routes: B11 All Visa Holders or those on a protection route (556).

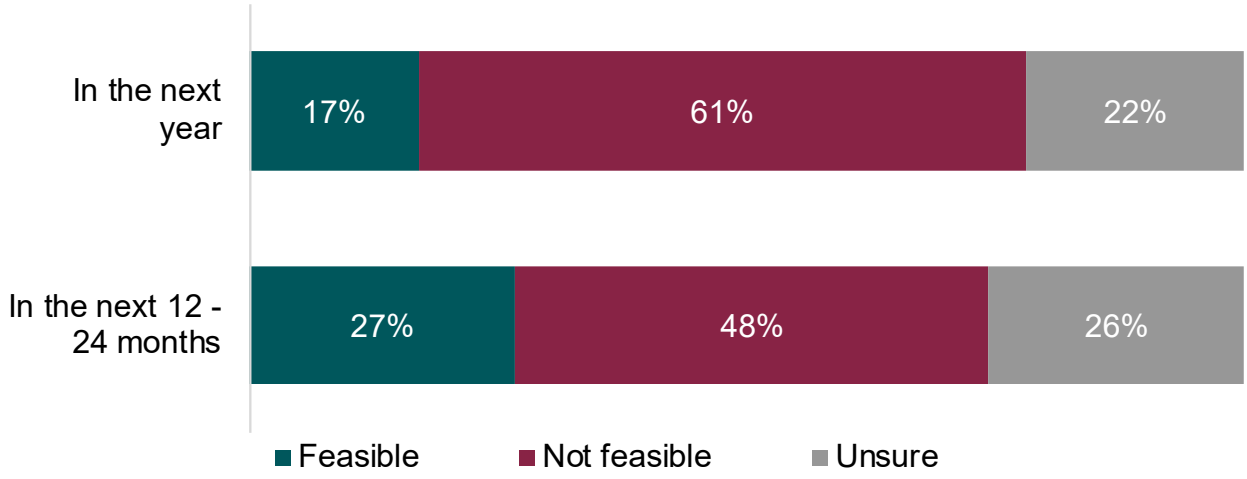
Policy-specific impacts

Labour market activity

Those on Student or Graduate routes paying basic rate tax generally reported limited scope to move into higher-paid roles. A majority (61%) reported that it would not be feasible for them to switch to a job with a taxable income above £50,270 in the next year. A further 22% were unsure whether they would be able to switch. This is similar to those on routes to settlement, where 55% reported they would be unable to switch and 29% were unsure.

Expectations were somewhat more optimistic over longer periods: among those on Student and Graduate routes, 48% said they could not feasibly switch to a job earning above £50,270 in 12 to 24 months, 27% thought they could and a similar proportion (26%) were unsure (Figure 37).

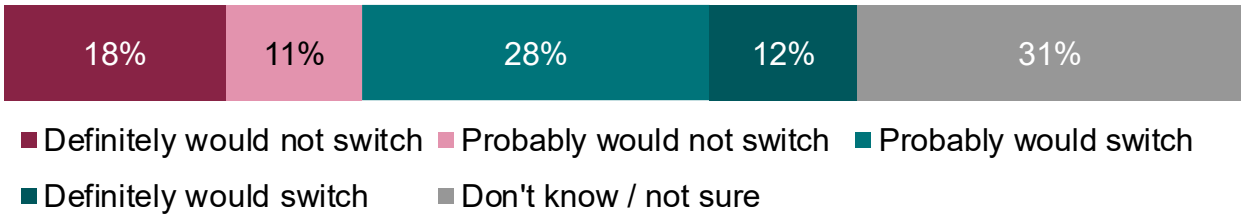
Figure 37: Feasibility of switching to job earning £50,270+ per annum



Base: Student or Graduate Routes: C4c, All current UK Visa Holders or those on a protection route who are paying basic rate tax (268).

Those on Student or Graduate routes indicated slightly greater flexibility in relation to changing jobs compared with those on routes to settlement. Around 41% paying basic rate tax said they would probably or definitely switch to a job paying above the higher rate tax threshold within the next year if it reduced their qualifying period (Figure 38). Only 35% of those on routes to settlement said they would probably or definitely switch jobs.

Figure 38: Likelihood of switching to a job earning above £50,270 per annum if it meant a reduced qualifying period



Base: Student or Graduate Routes: C5a, All current UK Visa Holders or those on a protection route who are paying basic rate tax (268).

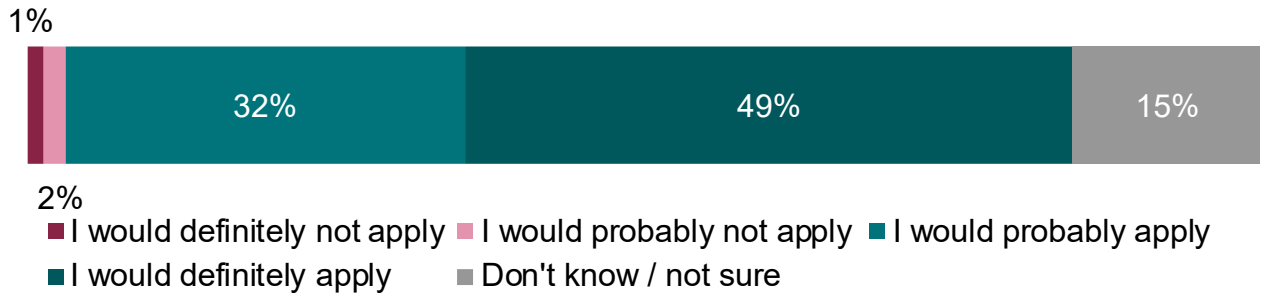
In contrast, 28% said they probably or definitely would not switch, while a similar proportion (31%) were unsure. This suggests a somewhat greater responsiveness to financial incentives among Student and Graduate route holders, compared with those on routes to settlement (35% of whom said they would probably or definitely switch within the next year).

Those on Student or Graduate routes were less likely than those on routes to settlement to consider applying for a public service occupation, even where doing so would reduce their qualifying period. Around 53% said they would probably or definitely not apply for such roles, compared to 43% of those on routes to settlement.

This appears to reflect perceived barriers to entry. Those on Student or Graduate routes were more likely to report that they lacked the necessary experience or qualifications to move into public service roles. Around 53% said they lacked the required work experience, and a similar proportion (49%) said they lacked the necessary qualifications. Only 30% of those on routes to settlement lacked the required work experience and 41% lacked the required qualifications.

Despite this, there was strong support for reduced qualifying periods linked to public service work. Around 82% of those on Student or Graduate routes said they would apply for settlement if public service workers qualified after 5 years (Figure 39).

Figure 39: Likelihood of applying for settlement if reductions applied to public sector workers



Base: Student and Graduate: C9, All student or graduate Visa Holders or those currently on a protection route working in the public sector or who would/would probably apply for a public sector job (281). Data labels below 5% not shown on chart.

Those on Student or Graduate routes were more likely than those on routes to settlement to have applied for degree-level roles in the past year. Around 77% reported that they had applied for at least one degree-level job (compared to 37% of those on routes to settlement), suggesting greater engagement with higher-skilled employment opportunities.

When presented with a potential incentive, 50% of those on Student and Graduate routes in jobs not requiring an RQF level 6 qualification said they would consider applying for a degree-level job if it prevented an extension to their qualifying period (Figure 40). A smaller proportion either said they would not apply for a degree-level job (26%) or were unsure (24%). Those on routes to settlement were less likely to apply for a degree-level job, as only 39% said they would consider applying, 30% said they would not and 31% were unsure.

Figure 40: Likelihood of changing to a degree level job if it led to a reduction in time to settlement

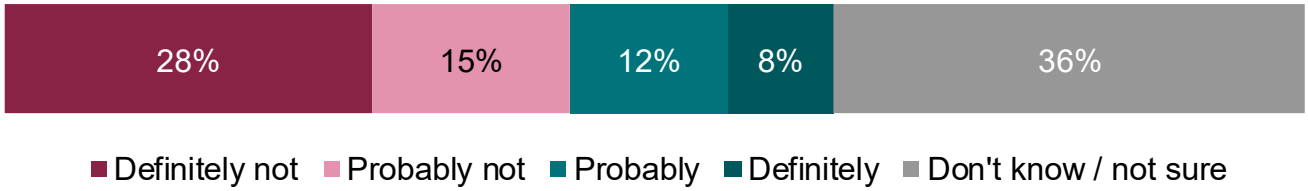


Base: Student and Graduate: C25, All current UK Visa Holders or those currently on a protection route whose current job requires a minimum qualification below level 6 (131).

Where respondents said they would not pursue higher-skilled roles, those on Student or Graduate routes were less likely to report barriers related to experience. Around 29% said they lacked the required work experience, compared with half of those on routes to settlement (50%), indicating comparatively fewer perceived constraints in accessing higher-skilled roles.

Extending the qualifying period for settlement appears to have a notable impact on intentions (Figure 41). Around 43% of those on Student or Graduate routes (compared to 35% of those on routes to settlement) said they would not apply for settlement if the qualifying period were increased to 15 years for those in non-degree level jobs. In contrast, 20% said they would probably or definitely still apply, compared to 27% of those on routes to settlement.

Figure 41: Likelihood of applying for settlement if the qualifying period were increased to 15 years for those working in jobs below degree-level

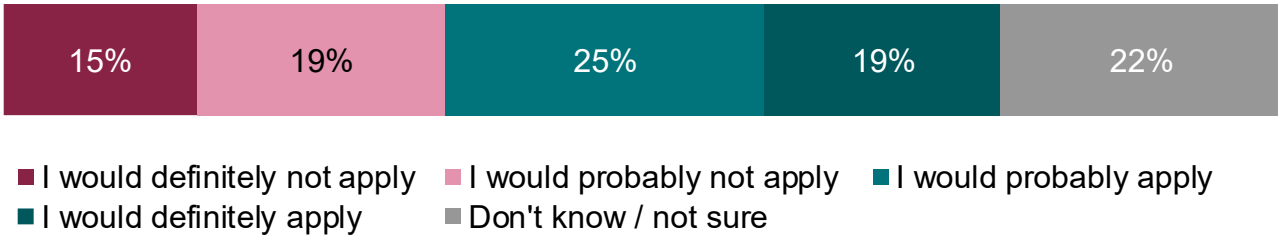


Base: Student and Graduate: C27, All current UK Visa Holders or those currently on a protection route (556).

English language proficiency

Among those on Student or Graduate routes, responses to a reduction in the qualifying period for individuals with an advanced (C1 level) English language qualification were mixed (Figure 42). Around 44% said they would probably or definitely apply for settlement if the qualifying period were reduced from 10 to 9 years. A slightly lower proportion (35%) said they would probably or definitely not apply, while 22% were unsure. Those on routes to settlement were more likely to be unsure (29%) but otherwise expressed similar views to those on student or graduate routes.

Figure 42: Likelihood of applying for settlement if there was a reduction for having an advanced (C1 level) English language qualification



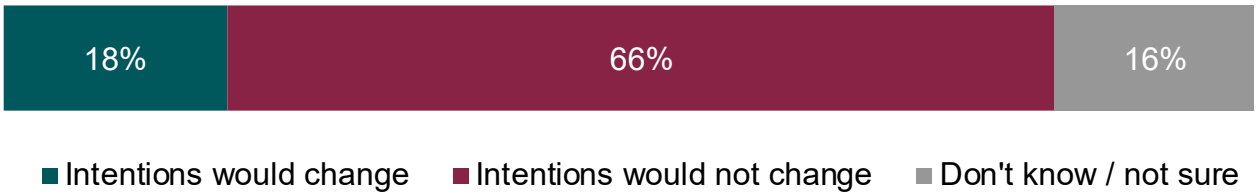
Base: Student and Graduate: C12, All current UK Visa Holders or those currently on a protection route (556).

Transitional arrangements

Support for transitional arrangements was high among those on Student or Graduate routes, despite many not yet being on a direct pathway to settlement. With almost identical proportions of those on routes to settlement, 83% agreed with the principle of protecting those already on a 5-year route, compared with 8% who disagreed and 9% who were unsure.

When asked how such arrangements would affect their own intentions, most respondents indicated that their plans would remain stable. Around 66% said their settlement intentions would not change if an Earned Settlement framework were introduced but did not apply to those already on a 5-year pathway (Figure 43). A smaller proportion (18%) said their intentions would change, while 16% were unsure. Those on student or graduate routes were less certain about their intentions than those on routes to settlement, where 75% said their settlement intentions would not change, 14% said they would and 11% were unsure.

Figure 43: Impact of transitional arrangements on settlement intentions



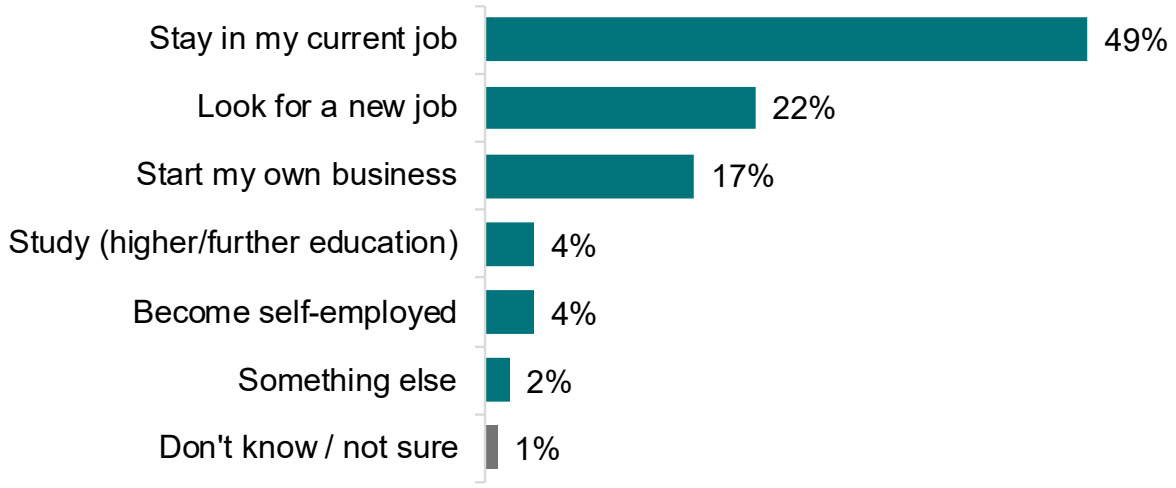
Base: Student or Graduate Routes: B10a, All current UK Visa Holders or those on a protection route who have not already applied for settlement (555).

Future plans

Plans following the grant of settled status

Planned activity following settlement differed somewhat between those on Student or Graduate routes and those on routes to settlement. Those on Student or Graduate routes were less likely to expect to remain in their current job (49%) and more likely to anticipate either looking for a new job (22%) or starting their own business (17%). In contrast, relatively few expected to continue studying (4%), indicating that most anticipate transitioning more fully into the labour market after settlement (Figure 44).

Figure 44: Plans following the grant of settled status



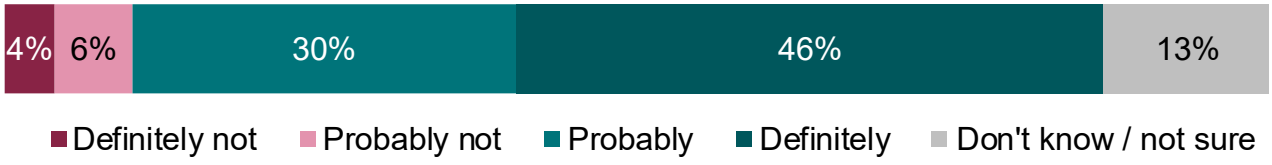
Base: Student and Graduate routes: B13A, All current UK Visa Holders or those currently on a protection route who intend to settle (370)

Intentions to apply for British citizenship

Intentions to move from settlement to citizenship appeared less certain among those on Student or Graduate routes than those on routes to settlement. Around 46% said they would definitely apply for British citizenship following settlement.

A small minority (4%) said they would definitely not apply. These findings indicate that individuals on Student or Graduate routes may be less firmly committed to progressing to citizenship after obtaining settled status, with a greater degree of uncertainty around longer-term plans (Figure 45).

Figure 45: Intention to apply for British citizenship following the grant of settled status



Base: Student or Graduate routes: C29, All current UK Visa Holders or those currently on a protection route who have not already applied for settlement, but who had considered it at some point as an option for remaining in the UK (447).

Chapter summary

Awareness of settlement among those on Student and Graduate routes was relatively high, but engagement typically occurred later in the migration journey compared with those already on routes to settlement. While most had considered applying, intentions were characterised by greater uncertainty, and settlement played a less central role in initial migration decisions.

Under the current framework, most indicated that they would apply for settlement. Contingency planning was common, with many considering alternative pathways or leaving the UK.

Only around one third said they would apply under an Earned Settlement model, with high levels of uncertainty, largely linked to longer settlement timescales. Policy-specific incentives showed mixed potential to influence behaviour. Many reported practical barriers to changing jobs, increasing earnings, or entering public service roles. There was strong support for transitional arrangements.

Overall, those on Student and Graduate routes appear particularly sensitive to changes that extend the time required to qualify for settlement.

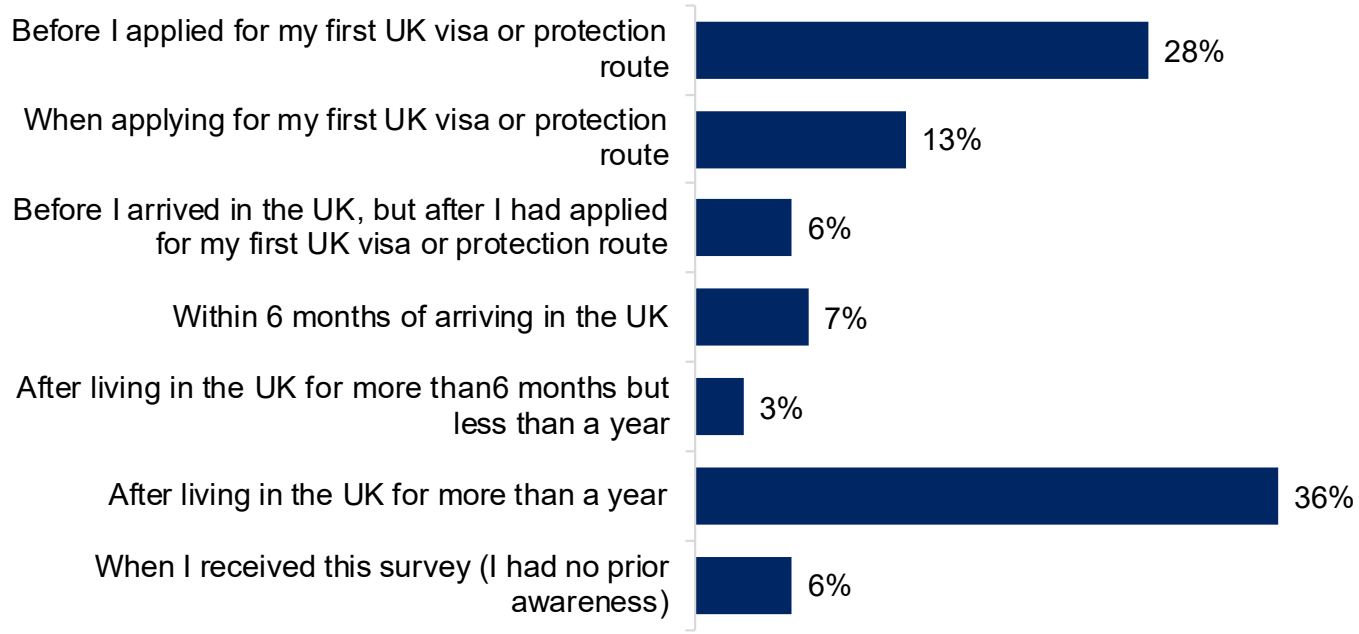
Chapter 6: Those with Indefinite Leave to Remain

Reflections from those with Indefinite Leave to Remain

This section draws on evidence from those who had already obtained ILR or had applied for settlement, providing insight into their awareness of settlement and how it informed decisions at earlier stages of their migration journey.

Among those who were on routes to settlement and had subsequently obtained ILR, 48% said that they had considered applying before arriving in the UK, while 52% considered this after arrival (Figure 46).

Figure 46: First consideration for applying to settlement amongst those with ILR

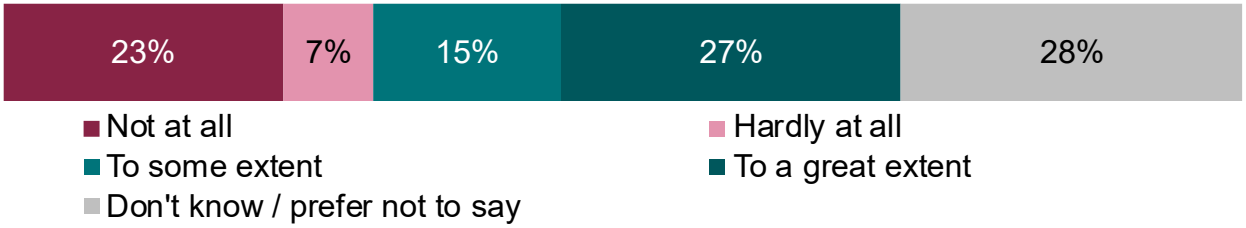


Base: Routes to settlement: D1, Those with indefinite leave to remain (680).

Earlier consideration was more common among higher earners. Those earning £50,000 or more were more likely than average to have considered settlement prior to arrival (68%).

Views were more mixed regarding the extent to which the opportunity to settle influenced initial migration decisions. Around 43% of those with ILR said that the ability to apply for settlement had influenced their decision to come to the UK to some or a great extent. In contrast, 30% felt it had little or no influence, while a substantial proportion (28%) were unsure (Figure 47).

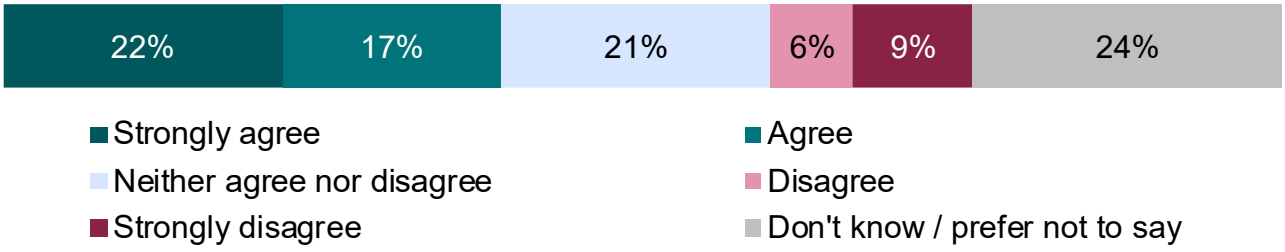
Figure 47: Whether ability to apply for settlement influenced initial decision to come to the UK amongst those with ILR



Base: Routes to settlement: D2, Those with indefinite leave to remain (680). Base is less than 50 for Student or Graduate routes so they are not displayed.

A similar pattern was observed in relation to visa or route choice. Around 39% said that the opportunity to obtain settlement influenced the route they applied for, while 16% said it did not. However, levels of uncertainty were relatively high, with 24% unsure and 21% neither agreeing nor disagreeing (Figure 48).

Figure 48: Whether opportunity to obtain settlement influenced choice of UK visa or protection route amongst those with ILR or who have applied

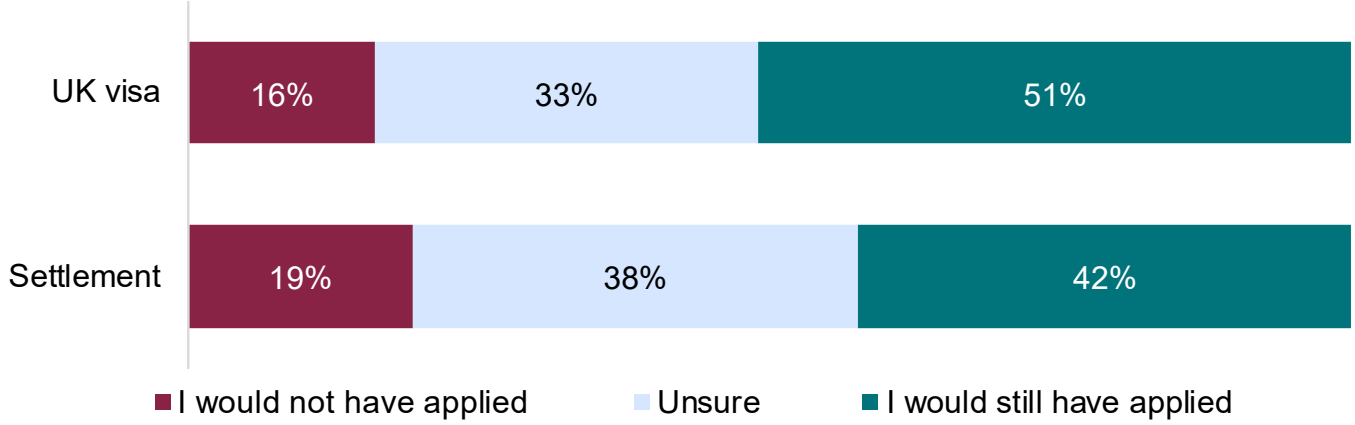


Base: Routes to settlement: D3, Those with indefinite leave to remain or those who have applied for settlement (796). Base is less than 50 for Student or Graduate routes so they are not displayed.

Hypothetical impacts of an Earned Settlement system for those who have obtained ILR

Among those who were on routes to settlement who had subsequently obtained ILR, or who had applied for settlement, views were mixed regarding whether an Earned Settlement system would have influenced their earlier decisions. A total of 51% indicated that such a system would not have changed their decision to apply for a UK visa while 16% reported that they would not have applied under an Earned Settlement model and 33% were unsure (Figure 49). Views were similarly divided in relation to decisions to apply for settlement itself, with 42% stating that they would still have applied, 19% would not have done so, and 38% were unsure.

Figure 49: Potential influence of an 'Earned Settlement' system on decisions to apply for a UK visa and for settlement amongst those with ILR or who have applied



Base: Routes to settlement: D5 and D6, Those with indefinite leave to remain or those who have applied for settlement (796). Base is less than 50 for Student or Graduate routes so they are not displayed.

Chapter summary

Among those with ILR in the UK, there was an even split between those who considered applying for ILR before and after arriving in the UK. The largest proportion of those with ILR said the ability to apply for settlement had influenced their decision to come to the UK to some or to a great extent. Similarly, the largest proportion of those with or who have applied for ILR said the opportunity to obtain settlement influenced the visa route they applied for.

Of those on routes to settlement who had already applied for or obtained ILR, around half said that an Earned Settlement system would not have changed their decision to apply for a UK visa or to apply for settlement, although relatively large proportions were unsure. This suggests that actual migration and settlement decisions may be less sensitive to policy changes than is suggested by some of the stated intentions reported elsewhere in the survey.

Annex A: Technical annex

Overview

This annex sets out the methodology used for the Earned Settlement survey, covering questionnaire development, sampling design, fieldwork procedures, weighting, and key limitations.

Questionnaire development

The survey instrument was developed collaboratively between the Home Office Analysis and Insight directorate and IFF Research, with input from policy colleagues. It was designed to capture both factual information (such as immigration status, employment, income and qualifications) and attitudinal responses relating to settlement and the proposed Earned Settlement framework.

The questionnaire covered respondents' current visa or settlement status and background characteristics, intentions, awareness, and behavioural responses to hypothetical policy changes. Scenario-based questions were included to assess how changes to qualifying periods and eligibility criteria might influence decisions relating to settlement, employment, or migration.

Prior to fieldwork, the questionnaire was tested through 10 cognitive interviews with visa and protection status holders. These interviews were used to explore how respondents understood concepts such as "settlement", "qualifying period", and "eligibility", as well as to assess the clarity and usability of the scenario-based sections. Findings from this stage informed revisions to questionnaire wording, routing and explanatory text, to improve comprehension for potential respondents, including those for whom English is not a first language.

Sampling design and sample frame

The sample was drawn from Home Office administrative records. The sampling frame consisted of individuals who had previously agreed to be contacted for research purposes and whose contact details were held within Home Office systems. The use of administrative data enabled targeting of individuals by visa / protection route, including both current Visa Holders and those who had already obtained settlement.

The sample was stratified by immigration route. Given substantial variation in population size across routes, a disproportionate sampling approach was adopted. This allowed smaller but policy-relevant groups (such as protection routes or Global Talent) to be represented in sufficient numbers for analysis.

Sample size requirements were informed by a target of achieving approximately 95% confidence intervals at route level. In practice, this translated into a target of around 350–400 completed surveys per major route where feasible (although this was not achievable for all routes due to sample availability and response rates).

In total, 224,120 individuals were invited to take part in the survey.

Fieldwork and data collection

Fieldwork was conducted online by IFF Research over 5.5 weeks in February and March 2026. All contact was made via email, with an initial invitation to participate followed by up to three reminder emails issued to non-respondents. Respondents could complete the survey in English, Farsi, Dari, Pashto, Tigrinya and Modern Standard Arabic.

The survey achieved a total of 4,728 completed responses, an overall response rate of around 2.1% based on the issued sample. It is worth noting that this response rate was depressed by some visa routes having particularly low response rates, particularly those identified on Home Office sample as having been on Student or Graduate visas. These two groups represented 39% of the total sample, and had a 0.7% response rate; excluding these visa groupings, the remaining sample had a 3.0% response rate, a more typical response rate for an online survey.

A second batch of sample was issued during fieldwork to improve coverage.

Response patterns and fieldwork considerations

Response rates varied substantially across routes, with particularly low engagement observed among some larger groups such as Student and Family routes. Several factors are likely to have contributed to the overall low response rate.

First, the survey was conducted alongside a wider public consultation on Earned Settlement, which may have reduced motivation among individuals who had already provided input through that route. Second, the contact details used were drawn from administrative records collected at the point of respondents' most recent visa application. As a result, for some individuals there may have been a gap between when their contact information was originally provided and when the survey was conducted, meaning details may no longer have been current or actively used. Finally, engagement may have varied depending on respondents' interest in settlement policy or their current stage in the migration process.

These factors should be considered when interpreting the results, particularly in relation to representativeness.

Weighting approach

To account for the disproportionate sampling design and differential response rates across groups, weighting was applied to the data prior to analysis.

Weighting was based on administrative "sample route" rather than respondents' self-reported current status. This approach was taken because robust population data were available at the level of sampled visa or protection route. Respondents may have transitioned between routes by the time of the survey, but information on the prevalence of these transitions was not available.

Separate weighting schemes were produced for:

- routes that lead directly to settlement

- Student and Graduate routes, which do not directly lead to settlement but may transition into other routes

For each group, responses were weighted to match population distributions by route, age and gender (using Home Office administrative data), applying a RIM weighting approach.

Some routes were grouped together due to small base sizes, and age was grouped by those aged 18-25, 26-35, and 36 and above. Routes on a pathway to settlement were grouped as follows:

- Asylum or Humanitarian route;
- BN(O);
- Family;
- Global Talent;
- Other;
- Skilled Worker; and
- Skilled worker: Health and Care.

Weighting is subject to limitations. For example, it does not account for differences in engagement or unobserved characteristics that may influence the likelihood of the survey response. In addition, there was no population data for individuals who had already obtained settlement which could be used for weighting.

Data processing and analysis

Following fieldwork, quality assurance checks on the data included removing incomplete responses, validating routing logic, and checking for inconsistencies in key variables such as visa status and employment.

Derived variables were created to support analysis, including groupings of visa routes and demographic categories. Survey estimates were produced using weighted data, while base sizes reported alongside results reflect unweighted sample counts.

Limitations

The survey findings should be interpreted in light of several limitations inherent to the study design.

Most notably, the low overall response rate increases the risk of non-response bias. Although weighting has been applied to adjust for known differences between the sample and the population, it cannot fully correct for differences between respondents and non-respondents. The sample is also limited to individuals who had previously consented to be contacted for research and for whom valid email addresses were available.

A further limitation is the use of sampled route, which may not always reflect respondents' current immigration status.

In addition, the survey relies on self-reported information for variables such as income, qualifications and English language ability. These measures may be subject to recall error or social desirability bias.

Finally, the survey was administered online only. This may have excluded individuals with limited access to digital devices or lower levels of digital literacy.